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DRAGON

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What Do You Want From Me?

One of the jobs I do is plowing through the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* submissions inbox (submissions@wizards.com, if you're curious), or the slush pile as it's affectionately known in publishing. Many editors I've known dislike reading the slush, but I enjoy it. In fact, I'd say it's one of my favorite parts of the job. Everything that comes in 'over the transom' these days gets read by me. I try to respond to everything, even if that response usually is nothing more than "Thanks for the submission. This one isn't quite what we're looking for right now."

That response often leads to a follow-up note from the writer asking "what are you looking for right now?"

The answer I send back is, "I'm looking for article ideas that make me sit up and go 'wow'."

I suppose that a lot of writers find that answer not very helpful. From my perspective, it's the best answer to give. The reasons for that are more numerous than I can cover in one short editorial, so I'll cover just two this time around and delve into others in upcoming blogs. (And I'll make this resolution: to post at least two blog entries per month letting people know what's going on in the magazines.)

First and foremost, we see many proposals that are more of the same: an arcane controller 'with a twist', a divine leader striker 'with a twist', an elf psion 'with a twist', etc. If that's your angle, then the twist needs to be amazing—it needs to make me sit up and go 'wow'.

The second and related sale-stopper is new class and/or race combinations which are too narrow and specific: a dwarf arcane barbarian controller, a wilden divine bard defender/striker, etc. We look for articles that will have wide appeal. An article on a goliath psion leader from a distant corner of Faerûn is going to lose readers who don't play goliaths, don't play psions, don't play leaders, or don't play a Forgotten Realms campaign. Not all of them perhaps; someone who doesn't care about goliaths, psions, or leaders but eats up FR may still read that article. But as it narrows its focus, it narrows its appeal, and fewer people find it interesting.

Finally, most proposals of these types involve a dozen new feats and powers. For quite a while, 4E needed new feats and powers to complement the new classes and races in the *Player's Handbooks*. Now, the *DDI Compendium* contains thousands of both feats and powers. Less-experienced players are overwhelmed by choices, and even many experienced players can't keep track of all the subtle differences between them.

That's not to say we won't run more feats and powers; we will. Gaps still exist. Some character archetypes can still benefit from fleshing out. But expanding the feats and powers library is not going to be our #1 focus going forward.

What is? I'll delve into that in the blog. And I think I'll begin with the hot-button topic of crunch vs. fluff. As always, send your thoughts to dndinsider@wizards.com.

Heroes of the Fallen Lands: Earth Domain

By Mike Mearls

Illustration by Ralph Horsley

The lords of the earth preach patience, endurance, and fortitude in the face of overwhelming odds. Your duty is to be like the rock of the earth to your allies and community, a reliable source of support and strength. While others crumble in despair, you stand tall, strong, and resolute. In so doing, you bring out the best in your allies.

Your body and soul gain the core characteristics of earth: Resolution, endurance, and persistence. By focusing your efforts, you enable your allies and yourself to fight through pain.

Deities

Few gods that grant these powers are linked solely to the earth. Moradin is a patron of the dwarves and blacksmiths, and many of his warpriests embrace this domain. The evil deity Torog, trapped within the Underdark, features some priests who take this domain because of its link to their god's imprisonment.

Benefits

The following benefits apply to a warpriest who selects the earth domain. An earth priest is rewarded by having a high Constitution score. The prayers and abilities granted by this domain excel at reducing the damage you and your allies suffer. They also overwhelm your enemies, knocking them prone through brute force.

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Level 1: Earth Domain Features and Powers

The earth abides. It survives the slings and arrows of its enemies. It watches patiently as the days and years follow one after another. When angered, the earth erupts in destructive earthquakes to rend and tear the land. When placated it is quiet, almost invisible in its ubiquity.

Like the earth, your magic endures. With the blessings of the earth, you and your allies can resist attacks with ease. When you strike, you land heavy blows that leave your enemies reeling.

Benefit: You and each ally within 5 squares of you gain a +2 power bonus to saves against ongoing damage.

In addition, when you use *healing word*, the target takes half damage from the next attack that hits it before the end of your next turn.

You also gain the following powers.

Domain At-Will Power

This simple prayer is your first step to shaping the magic of earth and stone. At your command, an ally gains the endurance of stone. In imparting this gift, your arms become as hard as granite, lending extra power to your attacks.

Earth's Endurance — Cleric Attack 1

You channel the resolute, overwhelming power of stone. The magic you call forth protects you and your allies, while it imbues your weapon arm with great strength.

At-Will ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Level 21: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Effect: You or one ally within 5 squares of you gains a +2 power bonus to AC until the end of your next turn.

Domain At-Will Power

This prayer channels divine energy into your weapon. When it strikes a foe, your enemy's limbs become as heavy as granite. Unable to defend itself for a key moment, your foe is left vulnerable to your allies' attacks.

Burden of Earth — Cleric Attack 1

As your mace crashes into your foe, your enemy's back and limbs sag as if burdened with a great weight, leaving it vulnerable to your allies' attacks.

At-Will ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage and push the target 1 square.
Level 21: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Effect: The next time you or an ally attacks the target before the end of your next turn, that character gains a +1 power bonus to the attack roll.

Domain Utility Power

The stone is your ally, and with the help of your divine magic you can speak to it to learn its secrets. The stone has few words, but its whispered advice can reveal secrets you otherwise would miss.

Stone Speak — Cleric Utility 1

You reach down to touch the stone beneath you and at your urging, it tells you the tale of this place.

Encounter ✦ Divine
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You make a Perception check with a +5 power bonus to detect secret doors, hidden objects, and hidden creatures within 10 squares.

Domain Encounter Power

The earth is an indomitable foe and a potent ally, as demonstrated by this prayer. You unleash the earth's power to transform simple stones into deadly projectiles. In the wake of this attack, the ground shudders and twists, grinding your enemies' advance to a halt.

Earthen Hail — Cleric Attack 1

As your weapon slams into your enemy, shock waves of power emanate from it to bombard your foes with shards of stone. That same energy imbues you and your allies with superior endurance and durability.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and enemies in a blast 3 that includes the target suffer damage equal to your Constitution modifier. The target also takes this damage.
Effect: You and each ally within 3 squares of you gain a +2 power bonus to AC and Fortitude until the end of your next turn.

Level 1: Channel Divinity (Earth)

You channel the strength and resolve of stone into your allies, allowing them to absorb attacks with the stoic resolve of a mountain.

Stone's Resolve — Cleric Utility 1

For a brief moment, you or a nearby ally become a creature of living rock.

Encounter ✦ Channel Divinity, Divine
Minor Action — **Close** burst 2
Target: You or one ally in the burst
Effect: The target gains resist 5 to all damage until the end of your next turn.
Level 11: Resist 10.
Level 21: Resist 15.
Special: You can use only one channel divinity power per encounter.

Level 3: Earth Domain Encounter Power

This prayer demonstrates that the earth itself is yours to command. With but a handful of dirt and the power of your magic, you create a warding shield of unbreakable granite. The shield slams into your foes, driving them away before its magic flows back to protect your allies.

Granite Shield — Cleric Attack 3

You invoke the power of earth to attack your enemy and call forth a shield of granite to protect your allies from harm.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action — **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1[W]+ Wisdom modifier damage and push the target 3 squares.
Effect: You gain an aura 2 that lasts until the end of your next turn. You and your allies gain resist 5 to all damage while in the aura.

Level 5: Earth Domain Feature

Your healing magic flows through the earth and ground. When you mend an ally's wounds, your magic can also pull it across the earth. You draw on the great, implacable weight of the mountains to send your ally into battle or pull him away to safety.

Benefit: Whenever you use *healing word*, if the target is standing on the ground, you can slide it a number of squares equal to your Constitution modifier.

Level 7: Earth Domain Encounter Power

Earth's power rests not only in the mountains and crashing boulders but in the subtle power of soil and rock. This prayer lets you draw forth the slumbering power that rests in every shard of earth, even the smallest trace of dust. At your command, they form a mighty weapon that chokes and distracts your enemy as your allies move in for the kill.

Blessing of Dust — Cleric Attack 7

You cast dust in a circle around you. The dust swirls, distracting your enemy as your allies press the attack.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action — **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Effect: The target falls prone.

Level 10: Earth Domain Feature

The strength of stone and earth flows through your magic. When you attack, your weapon becomes imbued with the weight and power of an avalanche. Your foes fall before this attack, driven to their knees by your divine might.

Benefit: Whenever you use a melee divine encounter attack power that attacks Fortitude defense, any target you hit also grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Devout Action (Earth)

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

The earth beneath you is a living thing. You can feel the ebb and flow of the roots that run through it, the veins of metal hidden within its grasp, and the countless living things that burrow through it. This relationship runs two ways. You feel the earth's pain and joy, and it reflects your emotion. Normally the earth is too vast for your feelings to move it, but in the midst of battle it roars in fury alongside you. When you are pushed to deeds of great valor, the earth trembles beneath your foes in reflection of your wrath.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to gain an extra action, choose one enemy within 5 squares of you. That enemy falls prone.

Level 11: Transcendent Blessing (Earth)

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

The power of the earth flows through your magic. When you invoke your prayers, they carry the might of earth into your bones. For a brief moment, you have the strength and tenacity of a mountain.

Benefit: When you use *earth's endurance*, the effect applies to both you and one ally, instead of just one ally, and you and that ally also gain a +2 power bonus to Fortitude defense.

Level 12: Earth Domain Utility Power

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

Stone and earth seem to leap at your command through the power of your divine magic. This prayer allows you to craft a formidable barrier against your enemies in an instant.

Bulwark of Stone — Devout Warpriest Utility 12

A rocky barrier emerges from the ground at your command.

Daily ✦ Conjuration, Divine
Standard Action **Area** wall 8 within 10 squares

Effect: You conjure a wall of rough stone that acts as blocking terrain. The wall can be up to 4 squares high and must be on a solid surface. While you or an ally stand on the wall or are adjacent to the wall, that character gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses. Each square of the wall has 100 hit points and crumbles into difficult terrain if it is destroyed. The whole wall crumbles into difficult terrain at the end of the encounter.

Level 13: Earth Domain Encounter Power

Once you hurled stones imbued with divine energy at your foes. Now, with your superior command of divine magic, you call the earth to rise and fall at your command.

Earthen Vanguard — Cleric Attack 13

Earth and stone roll toward your enemies like a wave and your swinging weapons scatters them like rag dolls. The wave leaves your allies untouched, and the lingering aura of magic around them protects them like a shield of stone.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and enemies in a blast 3 that includes the target suffer damage equal to 2 + your Constitution modifier. The target also takes this damage.
Effect: You and each ally within 5 squares of you gain a +2 power bonus to AC and Fortitude until the end of your next turn.

Level 16: Earth Domain Feature

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

Your healing magic not only mends flesh but also grants your allies the strength and endurance of living stone. Attacks made against them are as effective as taking a dagger to a boulder.

Benefit: Whenever you use *healing word*, you and each ally in the burst other than the target gains resist all equal to your Constitution modifier until the end of your next turn. If you are the target of *healing word*, you do not gain this benefit.

Level 17: Earth Domain Encounter Power

The earth provides stout, defensive magic, but that is not the limit of its power. This prayer creates a shield of obsidian, a vicious, sharp rock that cuts flesh with ease. The shield slices through your foes before exploding into an aura of sharp spines that protect your allies and harm those foolish enough to stand nearby.

Obsidian Shield — Cleric Attack 17

A shield of gleaming black rock slams into your enemies with brutal force, then shatters into tiny shards that protect your allies and seek out enemy weak points.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage and slide the target 3 squares.
Effect: You create a zone in a blast 3 that lasts until the end of your next turn. While in the zone, you and your allies gain resist 5 to all damage. You and your allies gain a +5 power bonus to damage rolls against enemies in the zone.

Level 20: Earth Domain Daily Power

Devout warpriest paragon path feature
This horrid and deadly attack serves as a final punishment for those who dare stand against your divine power. You bid your enemy's flesh to become one with the stone beneath it, adding its body to the living rock of the earth. Perhaps in its new form, it can atone for the crimes it committed.

Entombing Stone — Devout Warpriest Attack 20

Stone from the ground seems to shift and flow around your foe as it rises up to claim its flesh.

Daily ✦ Divine
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One bloodied creature
Effect: The target is immobilized (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized and dazed (save ends both).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is petrified (save ends).
Special: A creature not touching the ground gains a +4 bonus to saving throws against this power.

Level 23: Earth Domain Encounter Power

The earth is many things. From the greatest mountains to a swirling mote of dust on the wind, the earth is the element upon which all other creation rests. With this prayer, you shackle your foe with chains of stone, leaving it defenseless and unable to move.

Earthen Chains — Cleric Attack 23

As you strike your foe, you intone a prayer to the gods which causes chains of stone to wrap around your enemy.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Effect: The target is knocked prone and cannot stand until the end of your next turn.

Level 27: Earth Domain Encounter Power

During the Dawn War, the gods of earth built a network of mighty citadels to defend the remnants of the divine armies until reinforcements could arrive. Their holding action helped tip the balance in the gods' favor.

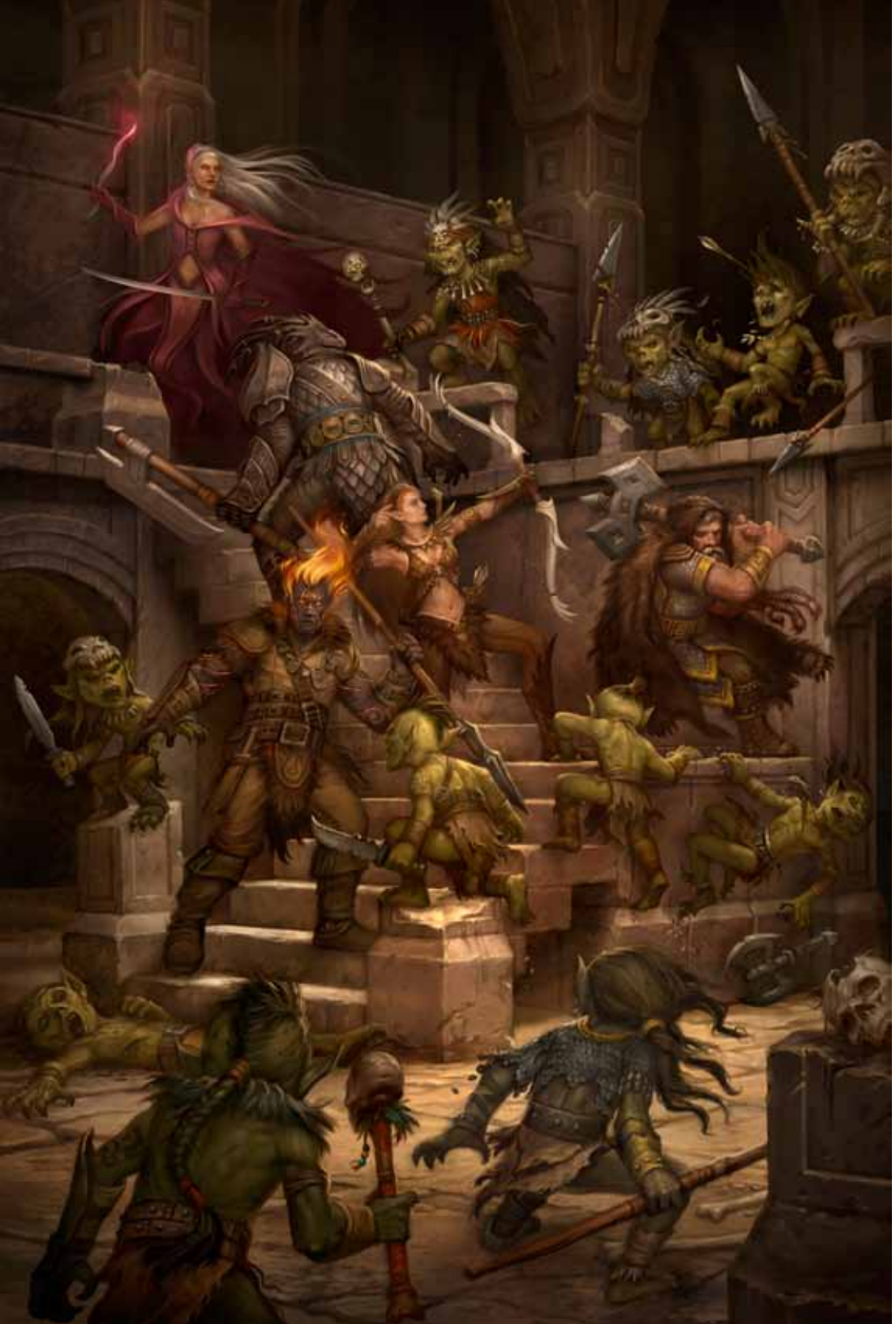
Earthen Fortress — Cleric Attack

As you lead the assault against your enemies, the magic of earth and stone swirls around your allies to shield them from harm.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and enemies in a blast 3 that includes the target suffer damage equal to 5 + your Constitution modifier. The target also takes this damage. All enemies damaged by this attack are knocked prone.
Effect: You and each ally within 5 squares of you gain a +2 power bonus to AC and Fortitude until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Group Manager for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include *Player's Handbook 3*, *Hammerfast*, and *Monster Manual 3*.



Everwatch
Living Beyond the Green Line

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Howard Lyon

Ghesh shifted in the saddle. He wasn't sure if his gloomy mood stemmed from the long journey or from the destination. It had been years since he was last in his adopted home, and not all his memories of Everwatch were happy ones. Yet, *he thought as he glanced at his companions,* without it I would have walked a lonely road without these stalwart friends I have made. Life would have been different indeed.

The Keen Blades, the name they chose for their band, all came from Everwatch. Ghesh was not born there, but he'd spent many years studying under the community's swordmaster, Ruald. During those rare moments when he wasn't drilling and practicing under the stern master's gaze, Ghesh made lasting friendships with the locals. When the goblin hordes spilled out from the Great Parch, he and his friends discovered they worked well together, so once they settled the troubles, they set out to find their fortunes.

It was a relief to be free from Everwatch and his mentor's scrutiny, yet he would not deny his companions the chance to visit the friends and family they left behind so many years ago. Ghesh was worried though. The Keen Blades did not leave with the community's blessings. Although they had helped turn back the goblins, no one believed the humanoids were well and truly beaten. Ghesh suspected the goblins would eventually come back in greater numbers. If they had, they did so when the Keen Blades were leagues away. Had Everwatch survived? If it had, it wouldn't be the same place. Of that, he had no doubt.

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The community named Everwatch stands on high Barrow Hill, where it overlooks a great, dusty plain. Behind its sheltering stone and timber walls live a hardy and independent people. The community prides itself on its determination and resilience despite the hardships they face on the frontier. The original town was built during the dark years following the Dragon Wars against the tiefling empire and the bright days promised by glorious Nerath. Everwatch has always stood as a fastness equal to the countless raiders crashing against its walls. With each war, Everwatch grew stronger and more confident than before. It is no wonder, then, that Everwatch has produced some of the world's great heroes.

Every adventuring group has a story, an origin, a starting point where its grand adventure began. While many groups come together in smoky inns or find themselves thrown together through circumstance or difficulty, there are those who share a much longer, common past, whose individual histories are tangled with those of their fellows since childhood. Just as Solace was home to the Heroes of the Lance in the *Dragonlance Chronicles* and Icewind Dale united Wulfgar, Regis, and Bruenor, so too could a community or region be home to your heroes. "Everwatch" provides a common starting point for adventuring groups, offering everything you need to establish a shared history which reinforces the bonds of friendship that keep your party together through thick and thin.

USING EVERWATCH

The best way to think about Everwatch is to consider it as an extended background element. It serves both to help you develop a history for your character and to create a unified story for your entire party, should you choose to do so. Rather than creating a convoluted story to bring disparate heroes together, Everwatch becomes your team's foundation. It gives you a place, quests, and background elements that can glue your characters together.

Everwatch can be anywhere you and your DM agree to put it. The core locations are defined, but the further you move out from the community, the sketchier it becomes. A DM can simply drop it into his game world and you're ready to go. Some of the features or story elements described here are bound to be unsuitable or incompatible with any individual campaign, but none of this material is fixed in stone. Change and cut as needed to fit Everwatch into your game world. For example, if your campaign is set on Athas, the Green Line could instead become a mudflat, a range of rocky badlands with abundant cacti, or even the Crescent Forest.

Furthermore, although Everwatch's community is described as being predominantly human, that might not match your party composition. Simly replace humans with dragonborn, tieflings, or whatever else you need to make it a logical homeland for your adventuring party.

Exploring Everwatch

Barrow Hill is the furthest mound in a series of denuded hills rolling down from the Green Line, an enormous pine forest that extends for hundreds of leagues to the north and south. Gray stumps spot the green and brown hills, marking the rocky earth like rotten teeth left behind when the fortified community was built atop the hill centuries ago. Barrow Hill, being the furthest mound from the forest, has a commanding view over this expanse of dust and stone called the Great Parch. It is a tortured land reduced to its present state by some long-forgotten calamity. The fortress perched atop the rocky mound is the lone adornment to the forlorn and tragic landscape. When night spills across the empty land, only Everwatch's lights hold the darkness at bay.

Legends and Myths

History grows murky more than a few generations back. Everwatchers concern themselves with the future and their present troubles and waste little effort on reexamining the past in search of things so nebulous as truth. This is not to say that Everwatcher's don't have a sense of place or purpose, but its history is sufficiently long and the facts sufficiently tangled that no one has been moved—or had the time—to try unraveling the knot for a century or more.

Common knowledge places Everwatch's founding sometime after the ancient wars between dragons and men but before Nerath emerged as a dominant power. This was a dark age filled with the groans and shudders of dying civilization. The few surviving

clues about the sort of place Everwatch was can be found in scrolls carefully preserved at the Shrine of Erathis and the coins recovered from old cellars or pulled from the soil by searching children.

The five parchment scrolls have faded considerably and all but one are fragmentary. Scholars who are intrigued enough to examine them and respected enough to be permitted to do so have pieced together an unsettling story. Barrow Hill was exactly what the name suggests: a mass grave for the soldiers who died conquering this land from the indigenous people, a folk many believe were elves. Human refugees from a faraway place called Andalopoli crossed the wide ocean (which some now believe became the Great Parch) and settled on its shore. They built the wooden fortress to watch for other ships sailing from their ruined homeland.

The rest of the tale is fragmentary, but it paints a grim picture of betrayal, dark gods, and eventually war. The outcome is clear from the absence of elves in the woods beyond the Green Line and the greater than normal half-elven population living within Everwatch. The few pure-blooded elves and eladrin currently living in Everwatch number less than a dozen, and all are recent arrivals by local reckoning. Mankind, it appears, was the victor.

Minor Quest: Missing Scrolls

A thief plundered the shrine of Erathis and made off with a few treasures, including Everwatch's scrolls. A search in the town turned up no clues, and it seems clear that the thief was an outsider. Father Dinivin dispatched you to track down the thief and recover the scrolls before they vanish forever.

Reward: 200 XP

Locals, especially grubby children, may uncover relics from time to time. The most common finds are old arrowheads, coins, and rusted blades that might have been daggers, spears, or axes. The craftsmanship and design point to elven origins, which supports the scholars' deductions.

As for where the sea went and Andalopoli's location and fate—these are questions with no satisfactory answers, at least not yet. The Great Parch is a brutal land and crossing it is deemed foolhardy. High temperatures and frequent dust storms are only some of the hazards travelers face. Rangers have ventured into it and returned with tales of sleek ships half-buried in the shifting dust and towering bones that must have belonged to monsters of terrifying size.

Minor Quest: Find Lost Andalopoli

Whatever Andalopoli was has been eclipsed by the fanciful stories and legends told around Everwatch. Finding the fabled city and unearthing its treasures and secrets is the stuff of fancy and imagination. What happened to the city? Is it out there still? Would brave explorers be rewarded with ancient treasure or only death and ruin?

Reward: 2,800 XP

Everwatch Today

Everwatchers have moved beyond their violent past and now concern themselves with protecting their community from the new dangers coming out from the wastes or stalking the shadowy forest behind them. The hills around the settlement are home to farmers who find much success in the strangely fertile soil and herders who tend their flocks with wary eyes that rarely stray from the Green Line.

Travelers are rare, but not so uncommon as to arouse suspicion when a tinker's wagon emerges from the woods or an adventuring band passes through on its way to some awful dungeon or other site. Visitors are welcomed into homes with spare rooms, and guests are welcomed into favored places before the fires in the Split Oak tavern. Everwatchers are a generous people, and they are hungry for news from other lands.

Although farmsteads and ranches speckle the hills around Barrow Mound, most Everwatchers live behind the community's steep, stone walls. A single trail winds up and around the hill, wide enough to accommodate two wagons side-by-side. There are no direct routes to the main gate, so the townsfolk can pepper invaders from the upper roads with rocks and arrows should the city come under attack. At the gravel road's end stands Watch Gate, a weird barbican constructed to resemble a yawning face, with arrow slits forming the eyes and nostrils.

Through the gate, one finds straight, cobbled streets lined with buildings placed so close together that most share walls with their neighbors. Space is valuable, so shops and taprooms are built upward, with rooms on the higher floors where families live in cramped quarters. Here and there, alleys worm off from the main thoroughfares. Upper floors of the buildings extend over these alleys, making them more akin to tunnels than honest streets, and in some places they are wide enough only for one person to slip through.

Everwatch has few open spaces. The largest and most crowded is the Clinks, the village market, where travelers and locals mingle and peddle their wares. Foreign merchants are rare, though, so most transactions take the form of barter rather than purchases with coinage. Common goods are always available. Textiles are mostly wool. Metal goods are made either

from recovered iron dug from the ancient battlefields or bronze made from the copper and tin that is mined south of Everwatch.

The greatest structure in the community is the Watch Tower, a drumlike keep in the center of town. It climbs another 60 feet above the three-story buildings around it. The Tower is literally the hub of Everwatch: it sits at the center of town with roads extending outward like spokes on a wheel toward the roughly oval outer wall. Watch Tower is home to the Baernor family, the nobles who have governed Everwatch since olden times. The present ruler is King Festrick, a quiet man who watches over Everwatch from a fatherly distance and has little interest in the courtly intrigues perpetrated by parasitic court sycophants and schemers, among whom he ranks his own sons and daughters.

Human Background: Baernor Scion

You are a member of Everwatch's noble family. You might be next in line to take the throne, or you could be a distant relation with few prospects. How do you get on with your family? With King Festrick? Are you a beloved member or a black sheep? How did the larger family respond when you chose to leave Everwatch and become an adventurer?

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, History

Law and Order

As with any community, there are bound to be bad seeds, folks who balk at law and custom. Luckily for Everwatch, the guard is competent and loyal to the crown, and the dozen or so constables do a good job keeping crime in check. They owe their success to a grizzled veteran named Ruald, who chased the Split Nose goblin tribe back into the Great Parch and scattered its warriors to the wind. Ruald expects and receives obedience from the warriors under his command and earns their loyalty by attending to their training personally. Ruald is a gifted swordsman, though he's skilled with most melee weapons and fighting styles.

In addition to the guard, Everwatch can muster some one hundred men and women to fight in the militia. These are part-time warriors equipped with spears and shields. They are summoned only when the community comes under attack. The Split Nose tribe inflicted heavy casualties on the community militia, so Ruald spends much of his time training their replacements.

Background: Student of Ruald

You trained under the swordmaster Ruald in Everwatch and honed your natural talents until you could hold your own in battle. The swordmaster takes on the responsibility of training the guard, but he will take on other students. Were you a member of the guard? Under what circumstance did you end your employment? If you weren't a member, how did you convince Ruald to train you?

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, History

Background: Everwatch Conscript

When you lived in Everwatch, you were part of the city milita. You learned how to handle a spear and shield well enough to stay alive at least long enough to fight goblins. Why did you join the militia? Was it the extra pay? The honor? A sense of duty? Why did you quit?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Perception

Religion

Everwatch's patron deity is a being known as al-Shaphal, Shiner of Light, who is said to have led the way across the vast sea to the new land where the refugees settled. Outsiders suggest that al-Shaphal is an older aspect of Erathis, the goddess of civilization, although the rites and rituals performed in her name are unique to Everwatch—being somewhat mysterious and spoken in a strange dialect. The clergy work from the Temple of Reason that stands adjacent to the Watch Tower. It is not as large as the Baernor seat, but it is no mean structure, either. Bas-relief carvings depicting civilization's forward progress festoon the exterior of this tall building with a peaked roof and bell tower.

Al-Shaphal gains the most attention in Everwatch, but shrines to lesser gods stand in alcoves on the nave's walls. Most of the common gods are represented. It might shock a visitor, however, to find darker gods receiving the same honor as their brighter counterparts; shrines to Bane, Zehir, and Tiamat are also present.

Background: Initiate of al-Shaphal

The Temple of Reason recruits initiates from the city's youth by scooping up preadolescents to mold their beliefs and attitudes about religion and make them valued servants in the order. You were such a child. Alongside your peers, you studied the teachings of the Shining Light (Erathis or some other god). The adventurer's life offered an escape from temple duties. You might be a heretic, driven out for radical views. You could be a temple agent who ventured into the surrounding lands to bring reason and light to the world.

Associated Skills: Insight, Religion

The clergy of Everwatch cling to ideas that may appear strange to outsiders. The priests claim that al-Shaphal is the highest god, a being above all others, who are alternatively his/her children, lesser kin, or in some circles, mortal heroes raised up in the Light's name as a reward for their great deeds. Objections to these beliefs are met with smiles and nods. The clergy is never roused by a nonbeliever's protestations.

Minor Quest: Chalice of Exekiel

Cyprilla, the High Priestess of al-Shaphal, is in charge of seeking out the best and brightest pupils and instructing them in the higher mysteries on their road to becoming holy warriors and mystics. Of those she invites into her confidence, she makes one demand: Seek the Chalice of Exekiel, for it and it alone can restore the lost lore from Andalopoli. It's thought the ancient mothers and fathers poured their devotion and lore into the Chalice as a way to protect Andalopoli from the Adversary and his legions. Tragically, the vessel was lost during the exodus from the ruined city. The relic might still lie in Andalopoli, it might be lost in the desert, or it could have been carted off by thieves. The High Priestess believes its recovery is crucial to the faith of al-Shaphal.

Reward: 4,150 XP

Old Faith

Although few folks recall much about the conflicts between the settlers and their elven neighbors, the remnants of the fey community remain beyond the Green Line. Rangers have found carvings in the trees, sometimes as great staring faces and others as runes and symbols. Standing stones bear markings in a gentle script and those attuned to magical power can sense it humming within these stones. The greatest and most mysterious ruin is the Eleizan Ring, a circle of stones crowning a bare hill about a league into the forest. Some believe the site was used to study the stars, others claim warriors were buried beneath the mound, but everyone agrees it was a place of religious significance to the vanished fey folk.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the sylvan people, especially among the fourth and fifth generation half-elves who hope to restore the culture that their human ancestors wiped out. Without guidance, the movement might have died out as a fad, but Erak Cobb, a charismatic and outspoken half-elf, has kept the interest alive. He claims to have peered into the "spirit world" and contacted an entity known as the Watcher. From it, Erak is learning about his ancestors and their practices in the certainty that he will one day unearth the truth about his peoples' fate.

Cobb's followers conduct their ceremonies at the old places. They make sacrifices and offerings to the Watcher and learn to evoke lesser spirits to weave interesting and strange magic. Anyone, regardless of race, is welcome to join what most Everwatchers see as a cult. Half-elves and elves hold positions of greatest authority within the group.

Background: Aspirant of the Watcher

You were intrigued by Erak Cobb for a while, during which time you participated in the rites and ceremonies, communed with spirits and, in the end, had your eyes opened to a different world. You might have gone on to further your studies, becoming a druid or maybe even a shaman. Or, you might have abandoned that path to pursue some other destiny. What was your story?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Nature

Secrets

The face that Everwatch presents to its citizens and visitors is one of a harmonious community free from conflict and trouble. Behind its pleasant façade lies an underworld as dark and strange as anywhere else in the world. Everwatchers don't speak of these elements but go about their lives with their hands over their eyes lest they be forced to face the cancer rotting them from within. One can catch glimpses, a glance from a sly cutpurse maneuvering through the market or the surreptitious visitor calling on a priest after the midnight bell. The sounds echo up from the sewers, a screech or mewling cry best ignored, or in the rare corpse found at dawn's first light by a passing patrol.

The Graves

Everwatch stands atop a mass grave created so long ago that most people don't remember who was interred or how they died. About 50 years ago, King Frem ordered sewers constructed below the city. The architects placed the lines under the major thoroughfares with connections to the various buildings and neighborhoods. During excavation, bodies were discovered all over the city, and certain rumors

suggested that some of these bodies weren't entirely dead. The king and his officials silenced these rumormongers, but whispers about the walking dead persist, as does the nickname for the sewers: "the Graves."

The Afflicted: The sewer project cleared the city of more than just waste; it also created new real-estate for the city's destitute. Almost at once, the poorest of the poor vanished into the tunnels, where they survive on rats and whatever else they can find. Some claim that the sewers are crowded with a veritable army of Everwatch's castoffs, and among them are strange people with bizarre afflictions and maladies. It is true that disease is rampant among those who dwell in the tunnels, but other, weirder corruptions are sometimes spotted.

Background: Sewer Wretch

Your family was poor, and you grew up in the Graves. There you learned to hunt rats, scavenge, and thieve to survive. You also encountered the strangeness that haunts the deeper and newer passages, the undead and mutants that prowl the dark. Proximity to such oddness might have awakened psionic powers in you or you might have become touched yourself, burdened with an unnatural corruption. Then again, you might have clawed your way free from the dark to claim a place in the light.

Associated Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering

The Ambrosia Society

There are few genuinely wealthy citizens in Everwatch, and almost all of those who do enjoy affluence are almost installed in the King's court. Successful merchants and craftsmen also enjoy comfortable lives. It is to these people that the Ambrosia Society caters.

Tucked away at the end of a narrow alley is an innocuous building, small and unremarkable. Behind its mahogany door is excess and decadence, a place where wealth and privilege are welcome without the rabble begging and scratching for scraps. Only the most important people are admitted here, and membership is always by invitation.

The few members who mention the place dismiss the rumors of dark practices and wickedness, claiming that the Ambrosia Society is no much more than a restaurant and club, a place to sip brandy and enjoy a fine meal. What's strange, though, is that no one admits to working there. No deliveries are ever made and there are no ex-members. More than one agitator has gone missing after spreading rumors about the Society's illicit activities.

Making the Most of Everwatch

A hometown is a big part of every person's identity. Many derive their values, religious beliefs, and outlooks from the people they surround themselves with. It's said that you can never go home again, but home never really leaves you, either.

Choosing Everwatch as your group's homeland is only the beginning; there are still things you can do to strengthen your story by establishing connections between your characters, with NPCs, and with events from your shared past. Think about what it was like for your character to grow up in this rough frontier town under constant threat from raiders. Identify your family members, their occupations, and their place in the city. Come up with a few friends you left behind. They might have been childhood friends, lovers, spouses, even children. Or they might have been comrades-in-arms who chose to stay behind when you left. You might also have friends who left before you and are now somewhere out in the world.

Once you have a few ideas jotted down, work with your fellow players to weave them together. Consider how you met your current companions. Draw from important events, shared friendships, or circumstances to build strong bonds. Not all relationships with your companions need to be positive ones. You might have a rivalry with the fighter over a young man or woman you both courted years ago. A ranger in your group might have bullied you. Think about how these connections define your present relationships and then draw from them when you roleplay your character. The more you invest in your story, the more rewarding and memorable the roleplaying experience becomes.

For the DM

Everwatch is first and foremost a player tool, a storytelling aid that ties the player characters together. Players should be allowed plenty of latitude when it comes to adjusting or altering the material presented in this article, because the city is here to spark ideas and help frame their thoughts.

While designed as a player aid, Everwatch can be an asset for you, too. Old friends and nemeses may climb out from the past to create complications during the heroes' adventures. Characters might return home to visit loved ones only to find their homeland changed and far different from how they remember it. Or the heroes might discover that Everwatch is exactly as they left it and a perfect base from which to launch new expeditions.

If characters return to Everwatch (or you want to bring them back here for your own reasons), you have several strong hooks to hang a story on.

Goblin Raiders: The Split Nose tribe and its allies have attacked Everwatch countless times in the past, and they're certain to do so again. In recent generations, these attacks have been poorly organized and repulsed with relative ease, although never without casualties. That situation could change if the tribe is taken over by a powerful leader who understands how to take advantage of Everwatch's vulnerabilities.

Andalopoli: Remains of the legendary city lie somewhere in the Parch. Aside from the ancient treasures and creatures which have been buried there for centuries, it must contain clues to the true history of Everwatch, al-Shaphal, and the mystery of the Graves.

The Worship of al-Shaphal: Everwatch's unique deity may be a reflection of Erathis or Pelor, or al-Shaphal could be a remnant of a much older religion that is all but forgotten in other parts of the world. Perhaps the chalice of Exekiel is the key to understanding the origin and true nature of al-Shaphal.

The Old Faith: Like the worship of al-Shaphal, there may be more to the Old Faith than meets the eye or than Erak Cobb suspects. Were the fey creatures killed and driven off purely for their territory, or did something more sinister bring about their doom?

The Ambrosia Society: This is presented as a rather mundane, if debauched, social club, but it could serve any number of other purposes. Perhaps the highest members of the society understand the real secrets of Everwatch and work to keep them hidden from the citizens at large. Alternatively, the Ambrosia Society could be the town's last, true line of defense against evil influences from the past.

The Graves: The sewers beneath Everwatch conceal a terrible secret of the town's history—a mass grave of the elves and their fey allies who were lured to Barrow Hill with appeals for peace, then surrounded and massacred with the last of the arcane weapons brought out of Andalopoli by that city's refugees. The corpses were dragged into primeval warrens beneath the hill, along with the burned-out shells of the magical weapons that were used to murder them and which were the only other tangible evidence of the atrocity. The warrens were sealed and, as the city rose, all record of their existence was stricken from written history and from memory. Diggers working on the sewers inadvertently rediscovered a portion of the warrens, and the trouble is only just beginning.

About the Author

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Channel Divinity: Champions of Kord

By Matt Sernett
Illustration by Slawomir Maniak

The chill wind heralds him with its howling. The darkening sky is his cloak sweeping over the land. His face is the angry thunderhead, and when he speaks, his rumbling voice can be heard for miles. Lightning leaps from his briefest glance, and he lashes the world with rain and beats it with hail. From a throne of storms, Kord looks down upon all and sees too much weakness. His disgust fuels his wrath, and by his harshness he hopes to sow new strength. Those who cower at the thunder and hug themselves against the rain, those who flinch away from his fist—they mean nothing to Kord. Yet those who shout against the roar of the wind, and those who face the furor with cold determination—whether it comes from a storm in the sky or the frenzy of battle—these Kord smiles upon. And if they can grin at danger and laugh in the face of death, Kord laughs with them, long and hard.

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Most people pray to Kord in times of need, but only warriors and those who frequently battle the elements count themselves among his faithful. A farmer might ask Kord for many strong sons. A smith might beseech Kord to make her armor serve well in battle. And many plead with Kord to set his storms and wars upon foreign shores. But sailors, gladiators, soldiers, raiders, mercenaries, bullies, thugs—they know that Kord shows most favor to those with the courage to fight for themselves.

Beliefs and Duties

Those who follow Kord live by four simple maxims that can mean a great deal depending on who is putting faith behind them.

Have Courage: Be brave at all times. No challenge that can be overcome should be avoided out of fear. If you must retreat, regroup and return.

Be Strong: Maintain your health and grow your strength. Reject that which would weaken you. Endure what must be endured. Surpass what can be surpassed. Show your strength through action.

Fight: Never submit to something that can be surmounted. Allow no enemy to win by your inaction. Face problems and foes directly. If you want your enemies to be strong, attack their weaknesses. Pit your strength against an enemy's so that you can grow stronger.

Honor Those Who Show Strength and Courage: Favor them as Kord does, with a comrade's hand or a challenge that can make them stronger. Honor brave enemies more than cowardly friends.

Kord's Faithful

Different cultures worship the gods in various ways, but the faith of Kord is less organized than most. A kingdom of dwarves honors Kord as Moradin's general and prays to him for strong arms at the forge as they make weapons and for keen thinking on the fields of war. A settlement of elves fears Kord as the god of tempests and placates him with offerings tied to birds released into stormy skies. Eladrin warriors from a military school dedicate their bodies to Kord, engaging in intense physical training for hours every day. Human barbarians praise Kord as the Thunder God and roar his name as they charge into battle. Other elves delight in the fierceness of Kord, mimicking his lightning strikes with their hit-and-run tactics. Other humans construct massive coliseums in honor of Kord and hold games and gladiatorial battles in his name. Other dwarves build iron towers atop their mountains, hoping to attract Kord's blessed touch and use the lightning strikes to augur the strength of their foes.

Kord favors no one approach to his worship. His worshipers know that when they come into conflict, Kord has no favorite but blesses the bravest and the strongest among them from both sides. When a victor proves his or her mettle, the truly faithful among Kord's followers understand that Kord did not show pleasure with that combatant's ethos. Might did not make right. Kord believes in strength and courage for its own sake.

Warrior-scholars wrestle over the reason for Kord's amoral and impartial stance. Some say that righteousness will be made stronger through adversity. Others believe that strength and courage should not be bound by rules and moral strictures. Those most knowledgeable about the ancient legends of the Dawn War suspect that Kord might be preparing for some coming conflict—a Dusk War. If so, perhaps Kord is using the world to test whether good or evil is the strongest weapon against the foe Kord foresees. Or maybe Kord seeks to have the strongest mortals on his side, regardless of their outlook, knowing that they will set aside their squabbles when he calls upon them to prove their worth. None can say for sure because Kord dismisses such idle conjecture.

Initiation

Kord exists in the lives of most people starting at a young age. He is one of many gods that children learn to pay homage to as their parents and community do. They know Kord as the one whose anger or pleasure rumbles through the heavens and he who brings the slashing rain and biting wind. Kord demands strength in their labors and rewards it with bountiful results. The thunder is Kord, and the dark clouds are Kord too. The thrill of a contest is Kord, as is the heady rush one feels when in danger.

As a character devoted to Kord, you formed a deeper connection to the Lord of Battle. Your faith is more than rote prayers and simple supplications. You feel Kord's eyes upon you and seek to please him with your strength and courage. When thinking about your character's special connection to Kord, consider any of the following options. Think about them and the backgrounds that follow. How might they be combined to create your character's history and develop a deep and interesting personality?

Acolyte

Different communities have different ways of worshiping Kord, but all such temples seek to continue that worship. Your character has been schooled in Kord's simple teachings and trained for strength and courage.

Was your initiation to the faith under the auspices of a large and organized temple to all gods, of which Kord was one among the host? Did you instead learn of Kord at a temple devoted to him alone? Or, was your teacher a sole devotee in an otherwise less devout community? Was faith in Kord forced upon you? Was there a reason that youth in your homeland needed to be strong?

Legacy

Just as your mother conquered on the fields of war, and as your grandfather was hailed as a champion, and their ancestors before them, so too must you take up Kord's cause of encouraging strength and courage. Your actions must be an example lest you betray the vaunted memory of those who came before you. You honor Kord in thought and deed because doing so honors your family and continues their legacy of heroism.

Are such heroics considered common among your people? Do you have doubts about your ability to fulfill your destiny? If you fail, do you dishonor your name or are there other consequences?

Penitence

You weren't always so brave. You're not as brave as you act now. You were a coward once when someone else needed you. You failed, and nothing can repair the damage that was done. Since then, you have sworn to Kord to have courage in everything you do. You will endure the memory of your weakness and surpass it. Through action, you will prove to yourself and the world that fear cannot master you.

What was the event that provoked your penitent path? Did anyone help you to see the hero that lies within you? What will prove to you that you have nothing more to prove? Has your oath to Kord and yourself become an obsession?

Revelation

Kord was never a big part of your life. Like the other gods, he seemed just an idol to worship—a distant overlord to be begged for boons and who never seemed to fulfill those wishes. All the priests' mantras about self-reliance and Kord giving strength to those who show strength seemed like self-fulfilling prophecies—hogwash believed by the gullible desperate to believe in something other than themselves.

Then you felt it. The thunder of Kord thrummed in your chest. His lightning flashed through your blood. With one heroic action, Kord was with you, and despite your past rancor, you felt his delight at your courage. Your faith, or lack of it, didn't matter. Your weaknesses or cowardice in the past meant nothing. In that moment, he seemed to celebrate your bravery and strength, and then he passed on. You've sought to prove yourself worthy of his interest ever since.

What were you doing that attracted the favor of Kord? Do you try to spread his worship, or is your faith more about a personal connection? What do you do now to bring Kord's favor back to you?

Serving the Lord of Battle and the Father of Storms

Kord welcomes all the brave and strong among his faithful. Worshipers need not be called to him. They can serve themselves and honor Kord by being mighty and courageous, or they can squander their lives in weakness and ignominy; it matters not to Kord. Those who choose to devote themselves to Kord's worship dedicate themselves to his ideals in a very personal way because he promotes self-improvement of an individual's physical and psychological strength. If a worshiper wants Kord's aid and interest, he or she should act as though that reward is not needed. When you choose to make a character devoted to Kord, your character should have a reason he or she chose to follow a god that fosters such self-reliance.

Backgrounds

The following backgrounds offer inspiration for character development and how that character came to be an adherent of Kord. Each presents a basic concept and then asks some questions to inspire your own ideas about who your character might be.

After deciding upon your background story, you can (with your DM's consent) select one of the following background benefits.

- ✦ Gain a +2 bonus to checks with a skill associated with your background.
- ✦ Add a skill associated with your background to your class's skills list before you choose your trained skills.

- ✦ Choose one language connected to your background. You can speak, read, and write that language fluently.
- ✦ If you are using a campaign setting that offers regional benefits (such as the Forgotten Realms® setting), gain a regional benefit.

Gladiator

You found your faith in Kord in the blood-flecked dust and the echoing cheers of the mob. It came to you as you struck down one challenger after another. The wanton violence of your profession as a gladiator had to have some meaning or you wouldn't have the will to draw your sword. Your faith in Kord gave you the strength to survive, and Kord rewarded your actions by the thunder in the stands and the sight of another blood-red dawn each day.

How did you become a gladiator? Was it a choice, were you a criminal, did you owe debts, or were you a slave? How did you escape the games? Did you win your freedom, break free, or decide to walk away from the glory you could have gained through meaningless slaughter? Did you see any unusual creatures in the arena? Did you make any unusual friends or enemies?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Endurance

Berserker

You can't help it. When anger overtakes you, a crimson haze fills your vision, and the rage you hold tightly within you breaks free of your control. Your people call you a berserker, and among them you are both honored and feared. When you go berserk and spittle flecks your mouth, you know nothing of fear—you feel at least twice as strong and every sense seems heightened. Worship of Kord seemed as natural as a sailor praying to Melora.

How did you first learn you are a berserker? Do you see it as a blessing or a curse? What are your people like? Does your family have a berserker tradition, or are you an anomaly? Is your faith in Kord in gratitude for this gift, or do you hope to endure and overcome it?

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Perception

Natural

It's not your fault you were born the biggest and the strongest. You don't exercise. Strength has come naturally to you, but courage is another matter. Your size made you the target of ridicule when you were young, and it was years before you fully understood what a boon it was. When you learned about Kord, something clicked. You had all the power needed—all you required was the will to use it. Controlling your strength, knowing when to use it and when words are enough, is something you had to learn in back alleys. Once you started standing up for yourself, it felt like an endless stream of bullies and toughs wanted to test your mettle.

Do you still feel like you have something to prove? Do your adventures represent you taking on the other bullies in the world, or are they your attempts to face down internal demons from your past? Is being brave still something with which you struggle? Do you have any fears from a past you never conquered?

Associated Skills: Insight, Streetwise

Sea Dog

Every sailor worth his salt prays to Kord from time to time. To do otherwise is to invite his storms upon your ship. But you've never feared his storms. When the lightning slashes the sky and the waves toss the ship like a leaf on the wind, you like nothing better than to be at the prow, leaning out into the tempest like a living figurehead. Other sailors think you're crazed. On a ship your bravery cannot be doubted, but when the storms come, your sanity has been questioned. You've been lashed to the mast, and some have accused you of attracting Kord's wrath. You know the truth, though. On the sea you hear Kord the clearest, and in his storms you laugh along with him.

Were you captain of a ship or just a crew member? On what kinds of vessels did you sail: merchant, military, or any boat that left port? Why don't you sail as often as you once did? Is there some danger in the sea you aren't facing? Do you seek something on land such as a treasure or special magic item?

Associated Skills: Endurance, Nature

Struck By Lightning

You were a weakling and a coward, bullied and intimidated by too many people to count. When you could, you avoided conflict with a glib tongue or by hiding. Then one day a thunderbolt struck you out of the blue sky. You awoke in the arms of friends who were awed that you survived. From that brilliant instant when your world turned to fire and pain, you have had your shock of white hair and your cloudy "storm eye." They serve as daily reminders of your survival despite a lightning bolt that seemingly singled you out. That you escaped death, perhaps death hurled by Kord, gave you courage. At first you lacked the strength to back up your bravery, but you persisted and endured the beatings, learning and becoming stronger until at last none would call you weakling or coward. You know now that if the light-

ning strike came from Kord, it was not his anger, but his blessing: a test that you passed with flying colors.

Did you make any friends among those who once bullied you? Do any of the friends you had before the lightning strike resent the new you? Do you think the lightning strike was from Kord, or do you suspect a more mortal source? Does your storm eye have any special powers?

Associated Skills: Bluff, Stealth

Tempest's Child

They say you were born to serve Kord. Your birth occurred on a battlefield and during the worst storm in memory. Thunder heralded your arrival in the world, and when you took your first breath, the tempest and battle fell eerily silent as the eye of the storm—Kord's eye—passed over you. Since then you were tutored and trained by warrior-scholars of Kord. For years, every moment of your waking hours was dedicated to preparing you for something: exercises, combat training, tactics and strategy, lessons about all the great conquerors, and the fighting techniques of a dozen nations. Then one day your teachers said you were ready; they had no more to teach you and you must seek to learn more in the wider world.

Do you know for what your teachers were preparing you? Did they? Did your parents agree to give you over to the priests of Kord, or were you taken? What was the battle about when you were born? Do you believe yourself to be as important to Kord as those who taught you?

Associated Skills: History, Religion

DEVOTIONS TO KORD

Worshipers of Kord often show their devotion through acts of strength, athleticism, and courage. The customs surrounding these contests differ by culture and locality. Many pit one person against another in a series of fights while others are mass battles that mimic war with less deadly results. Below are a few "more refined" contests that have developed.

Kord's Roar: Participants line up at a start line, and when a horn is blown they run toward the face of a cliff or a specially prepared wall. On the way they leap over or struggle through pits, typically filled with water or mud. Racers then climb the cliff, and when they reach the top, they blow a huge horn as loudly as possible. The participant who finished fastest and who blew the loudest note wins. If the result of the two factors is judged to be a tie, a race back to the start line settles the matter.

Sky Climb: Devotees each climb a tree or a pole, or in more festive displays, a greased post. The one who climbs highest *and* leaps down from that height is judged to have the greatest strength and courage, often earning a prize such as an amphora or wine. In some areas, particularly those with a strong temple of Erathis, the height of the climbing surface is limited to prevent "overbold" participants from breaking limbs or dying in their displays of devotion.

Frost Fight: This contest takes place in winter or high mountains when ice forms thick over water. It is a reference to Kord's legendary betrayal of his own mother Khala, once the terrible goddess of winter before she was slain. Each participant stands on the ice and takes a turn punching the frozen space under an opponent. The opponent then returns the favor. The one who breaks the ice under the opponent wins. Both end up in the freezing water, and by custom the participants help one another out. In many places ropes are tied to participants and bonfires burn on the shore to warm them, but in more savage societies, enduring the cold is the true test of Kord's favor.

Skill Powers

Many game elements exist that suit Kord's themes of war, strength, storms, and valor. Plenty of class powers and items cause lightning or thunder damage. Others have themes of strength and endurance or emphasize courage and leadership. All can be great choices that help to reinforce your character's faith in the Lord of Battle, but if you're looking for a utility power that fits the bill, consider choosing one of those presented below.

As with the skill powers described in *Player's Handbook* 3, you can gain and use only the skill powers associated with your trained skills. Whenever you reach a level that grants you a utility power from your class, you can choose a skill power in place of a class power. The skill power you choose must be of the same level as or lower than the class power you would have gained.

You can use retraining to replace a class power with a skill power and vice versa, as long as the new power is of the same level as or lower than the replaced power.

You cannot replace a utility power from a paragon path or an epic destiny with a skill power.

Talented Athletics — Athletics Utility 2

You don't always succeed in feats of physicality, but your failures rarely cost you.

At-Will
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You fail an Athletics check by 5 or more when swimming or climbing.
Effect: Treat the skill check result as if you failed by 4.

Kord's Force — Athletics Utility 6

Summoning all your training as well as your might, your effort exceeds what strength alone could gain.

At-Will
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You would make a Strength check.
Effect: You make an Athletics check in place of the Strength check.

Strength Against Strength — Athletics Utility 10

You dramatically flourish your weapon after a failure to hit your foe, hoping the sweep of your legs and whirling of your arms will confound your foe.

Encounter
Free Action **Melee** weapon
Trigger: Your melee attack misses its target.
Effect: You make an Athletics check. If your result equals or exceeds the target's highest defense, you can knock the target prone or slide the target 1 square.

Exemplar of Valor — Endurance Utility 2

You brace yourself against the terror inspired by a foe, and your bravery serves as an example to your friends.

Daily
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 10
Trigger: You are the target of an enemy's fear effect.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you and allies in the burst that can see you gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against fear effects. In addition, you and allies in the burst that can see you gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls against the triggering enemy until the start of its next turn.

Internal Reserves — Endurance Utility 6

Summoning up reserves of strength, you make a desperate effort to prevail.

Daily
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You are required to roll a saving throw.
Effect: You make the saving throw with a +4 power bonus.

Steeled Against It — Endurance Utility 10

Once stung by your enemy's attack, you harden your body and mind against such future pain.

Daily
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You take damage of a specific type or combination of types.
Effect: You gain resist 5 to damage of that type or types until the end of the encounter. If you already have resistance to that damage type or types, the resistance increases by 5 until the end of the encounter.
Level 21: Resist 10.

About the Author

Matthew Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who splits his time between Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering. Recent credits include *Player's Handbook Races: Tieflings*, *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*, and *Magic the Gathering: Zendikar*. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.

Masters *of the* Wild

New Options for Beastmaster Rangers

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

"Rangers have more tricks and forms than a drunken changeling.

–Saying on the Ghostlit Coast

A ranger knows that in the wilderness, only the clever survive. To be clever, one must to come to terms with the rules of their stretch of wilderness and the rhythms of its inhabitants both savage and benign. Beastmaster rangers have not only come to terms with the wilderness, they've found companions within it–hunting companions both wondrous and steadfast. Stories abound of exotic beast companions. There is the villainous ranger, Dail the Hardfoot, who brought back a catoblepas from the Shadowfell, and the eladrin archer Galival who lassoed and tamed the ki-rin of Tza, even if these stories are often dismissed as myths. Most rangers share their near primal link with ordinary animals that are abundant in the world, both wild and domesticated.

Regardless of the animal, the shared link is often extraordinary. A ranger might scale trees as nimbly as his ape or have a slithering stance that mimics the movement of a serpent companion with amazing effect. The horse lords of the windswept plains are exquisite horsemen because of the bond they have with their companion.

Maybe the stories of Dail and Galival have more truth than is commonly believed.

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New Beast Companions

This article introduces two new beast companions—the horse and the simian. The basic rules for beast companions are found in *Martial Power*. For the horse companion, this article assumes that the mounted rules presented in the *Rules Compendium* (page 252) are in use.

Horse

Ranging from ponies to warhorses, the horse beast companion is most effective when ridden.

DMs, Get Creative!

Players enjoy flexing their creativity. Don't get hung up on the printed names of beast companions when your players have a hankering for something different and unique.

During days of the Living Greyhawk campaign, a player once asked me what she needed to do to obtain a stag for her paladin's mount. I squinted, grinned a little, and replied, "Just say your paladin mount is a stag."

As long as players use the rules and stats provided, there's nothing wrong with playing a little pretend. That's a big part of D&D, after all. Declaring that a horse companion is actually a stag, zebra, buffalo, or any other similar, four-footed beast is fine. So is allowing an elf, gnome, or eladrin to have some strange little fey creature like a twig blight or a dexterous or fantastical badger as their companion rather than a monkey.

HORSE STATISTICS

Ability Scores: Strength 14, Constitution 14, Dexterity 16, Intelligence 6, Wisdom 12, Charisma 6
Size: Medium or Large (you choose at creation, but must be one size larger than you if you want to use the Mount ability).
Speed: 10 squares
Defenses: AC 14 + level, Fortitude 13 + level, Reflex 12 + level, Will 12 + level
Hit Points: 14 + 8 per level
Attack Bonus: Level +4
Damage: 1d8
Melee Basic Attack: Hooves; level + 4 vs. AC; 1d8 + Strength modifier
Mount Companion: A horse beast companion is both a mount and a beast companion. It uses the rules for mounted combat (***D&D Rules Compendium*** pages 252-255) except for when it comes to actions. It uses the beast companion rules for actions (see "Commanding a Companion," ***Martial Power*** pages 41-42). Furthermore, the horse beast companion has the following additional rules.

- ✦ While you are mounted atop your beast companion and you use a ranger beast power that grants either you or your companion a shift, your companion shifts and you move with it.
- ✦ While you are mounted atop your beast companion and you use a ranger beast power that allows both you and your beast companion to move or charge, only the companion gains the move or charge, but you move with it.
- ✦ If both you and your beast companion are adjacent to the same target, you are considered flanking for purposes of beast power effects. The target does not grant combat advantage unless you are actually flanking it, or it grants combat advantage for some other reason.

Trained Skills: Endurance

Simian

Simian beast companions include both monkeys and apes. Your simian companion could be as small as a spider monkey or as large as an ape.

SIMIAN STATISTICS

Ability Scores: Strength 14, Constitution 14, Dexterity 16, Intelligence 6, Wisdom 12, Charisma 6
Size: Small or Medium (you choose at creation)
Speed: 6 squares, climb 6
Defenses: AC 14 + level, Fortitude 12 + level, Reflex 13 + level, Will 12 + level
Hit Points: 14 + 8 per level
Attack Bonus: Level + 4
Damage: 1d6
Melee Basic Attack: Bite; level + 4 vs. AC; 1d6 + Strength modifier.
Manipulate Items: A simian companion, more than any other beast companion, is adept at manipulating objects. Once per round on your turn, as a free action you can command a simian companion to drink a potion, open or close, pick up an item, or retrieve or stow an item.
Trained Skills: Athletics, Acrobatics

New Powers

All of the following powers are level 2 ranger utility powers. Each benefits a ranger with a specific type of beast companion. They represent the near primal connection that a ranger has with a companion of that type or some other trick the ranger has learned while with this companion.

Avian Grace — Ranger Utility 2

You don't know the secret of flight, but you have learned some lessons toward it.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial
Minor Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have a raptor beast companion
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you can make long jumps as if you had a running start, and you gain a +2 power bonus on your fly speed (if any).

Equestrian Maneuver — Ranger Utility 2

You guide your horse through tight spaces to reach that enemy who thought he was safe.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Minor Action **Close** burst 1
Prerequisite: You must have a horse beast companion
Target: You and your beast companion.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, while you are mounted on your beast companion, squeezing does not cause you or your beast companion to take a -5 penalty on attack rolls, grant combat advantage, or move at half speed

Feline Escape — Ranger Utility 2

You sidestep an attack as nimbly as your companion might.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by an attack that targets AC or Reflex
Prerequisite: You must have a cat beast companion
Effect: You gain a +4 bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of your next turn. If the triggering attack misses you because of this bonus, you can shift a number of squares equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1).

Path of the Monkey — Ranger Utility 2

You and your companion take to the trees as if born there.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial
Minor Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have a simian beast companion.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter or until your beast companion is killed or becomes unconscious, you gain a climb speed equal to your speed, and a +4 power bonus on Acrobatics checks.

Reptilian Perseverance — Ranger Utility 2

With the tenacity of the plodding giant lizard, you ignore those who would push you back.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Free Action **Close** burst 5
Trigger: You or your beast companion are pushed, pulled, or slid.
Prerequisite: You must have a lizard beast companion
Target: You and your beast companion.
Effect: Reduce the triggering forced movement on you and your beast companion by a number of squares equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1).

Slither's Stride — Ranger Utility 2

You twist, contort, and scramble with surprising grace and speed.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial
Minor Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have a serpent beast companion.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter or until your beast companion is killed or becomes unconscious, you can shift 2 squares as a move action and ignore difficult terrain when you shift. If you already ignore difficult terrain when shifting, you can shift 3 squares instead of 2.

Tenacity of the Tusked — Ranger Utility 2

You shake off a wound by channeling the savagery of the boar in combat.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You take damage from a melee attack.
Prerequisite: You must have a boar beast companion.
Effect: Reduce the damage you take from the triggering attack by a number equal to half your level + Wisdom modifier (minimum 1). If you take no damage from the attack because of this reduction, then you are not affected by any conditions or effects this attack would have caused on a hit.

Ursine Brutality — Ranger Utility 2

With a roar you lunge forward, bullying your enemies backward.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have a bear beast companion.
Effect: Until the stance ends, when you hit a creature with a melee attack, you can push that creature 1 square.

Web Trick — Ranger Utility 2

Sticky webbing is a lifesaver in sticky situations.

At-Will ✦ Beast, Martial
Free Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have a spider beast companion
Requirement: Your beast companion must be within 5 squares of you and able to make opportunity attacks.
Trigger: You make an Athletics check while climbing or because you took damage while climbing, or you make a saving throw to avoid being forced into hindering terrain or over a precipice.
Effect: You gain a +4 power bonus to the triggering climb check or saving throw.

Wolf Trip — Ranger Utility 2

Once an enemy is on the ground, your wolf companion excels at keeping it there.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You take damage from a melee attack.
Prerequisite: You must have a wolf beast companion
Requirement: Your beast companion must be adjacent to the triggering enemy and able to make opportunity attacks.
Effect: The triggering enemy is knocked prone and cannot stand up until it begins a move action not adjacent to your beast companion.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast and Paizo Publishing, and he is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. He also teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

Class Acts: Fey Wardens

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

Of all the planes beyond the natural world, the Feywild stands closest to the mortal realm. Cosmologists call it the bright reflection, or an idealized and exaggerated world discarded at Creation's dawn by those crude hands who forged the earth from raw chaos. Although these planes share many similarities, one place where they differ is in primal magic. This energy owes its origin to the spirits inhabiting the middle realm. These strange and elusive entities are unknown beyond the mortal world, though the power they offer can be carried forth by those invested in their ancient lore.

A kinship exists between the fey people and the primal spirits which allows the fey folk to wield such magic with incredible skill and finesse as evidenced by elf seekers and wilden shamans. Some sages suggest primal magic is the link between the two worlds. Perhaps the spirits were born from the union of both planes. Whether or not that is true, primal heroes who embrace the Feywild's influence gain much from their association.

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Wardens are powerful champions chosen by the primal spirits to defend the world against the despoilers, to safeguard unspoiled reaches against civilization's corruption, and to preserve Creation against exploitation by divine and elemental powers. The wardens are the last line of defense against these threats and thus command power unique to their traditions. From their doughty presence on any battlefield to the astonishing transformations they undergo when in the fullness of primal energy, the warden is undoubtedly among the toughest warriors known to the world.

To an outsider, primal magic seems to be uniform, much in the same way that arcane energy is pure until molded through formula or instinct into useful forms. This impression is not true. Primal magic is more akin to a river. It might begin pure, its waters clean and unsullied, but as it flows across the land, its character changes. It might become murky as it oozes through the wetlands, rough and powerful as it falls from great heights, and poisoned when it passes through civilized lands. As the breach wardens know (see *Dragon* #383), primal magic assumes the character of other, nearby energy, transforming its nature to mirror those other influences. Near an elemental breach, primal magic becomes wild and hard to control. Near a portal to the Feywild, primal power might become pure and, possibly, even more magical.

The fey wardens are individuals charged with preserving lands touched or otherwise influenced by the Feywild. Like other wardens, they can call upon vast reservoirs of natural energy, but when they do so, they find it charged with arcane magic. This doesn't always mean the warden hurls fireballs and lightning bolts, though that's a possiblity if the warden dabbles in an arcane class. What it does mean is that the warden finds it easier to bridge the two worlds and access aid and strength from both.

For this reason, fey wardens often keep company with minor fey creatures, sometimes called faerie or the wee folk. So small are these companions that they rarely have the means to affect a warden's enemies. Still, they can be helpful and lend support on the warden's missions, provided he or she makes the proper alliance (reflected in the powers and feats described below). The fey can act as extra eyes and ears, help the warden anticipate enemies, or protect them and their allies from harm.

These fey companions are drawn from the full pantheon of minor faeries, encompassing pixies and sprites, grigs, petals, brownies, bookas, and many others besides. Such creatures are never in the warden's control. They come and go as they please, lending aid or not, as they (and the DM) wish. The fey associate with these wardens because they share a common objective, which is to protect the land and its creatures from harm, rather than from any compulsion.

Most fey wardens have fey origins themselves. Elves, wilden, and the rare gnome might be adopted by faerie companions. Other races might become fey wardens through contact with the Feywild or its people. Fey wardens might follow different paths, though most are life wardens and wild wardens. These characters are more xenophobic than are other wardens and less likely to venture into civilized lands for extended time.

Warden Evocations

A fey warden uses evocations to call upon faerie allies for aid in their quests. The following evocations reflect this tendency and involve putting to use the faeries who accompany these characters. Any warden, though, can take these powers.

You can also adapt other warden powers to match the story elements described here. *Primal Power's guardian shock wave* suggests that raw primal energy churns the ground under an enemy's feet. It could just as easily result from tiny fey creatures working to trip and knock down your opponents who dare draw near.

FAERIES? REALLY?

OK, faeries are hardly "metal," and surrounding yourself with faerie godmothers isn't likely to win any Strong Man contests. But these are D&D faeries. They aren't charming leprechauns or silly brownies; they're wild, untamed, nasty little folk with sharp claws and teeth and a penchant for meddling, mischief, and making trouble for its own sake, uncaring of who gets hurt or how badly.

If that still isn't "metal" enough for you, just re-skin the powers. Rather than a faerie ripping apart the goblins, it could be the spirit of someone your character slew, horrid primal spirits made from teeth and claws, or just about anything else you like. On the other hand, the fey warden presents options different from the normal lightning, thunder, and bloodshed evocations normally used by wardens, and might just shed some interesting light on how the Feywild interacts with the world in your campaign.

Level 1: At-Will Attack Evocation

Playful Torment

When you use *playful torment*, your fey companions help you lock down an opponent, making it easier for you to exact retribution with *warden's fury*. The evocation is also ideal when paired with an action point to help make sure your next attack strikes true.

Playful Torment — Warden Attack 1

Your strike points the way for a tiny fey. It appears at your enemy's side and begins pulling and plucking to distract the foe momentarily.

At-Will ✦ Primal, Weapon
Standard Action — **Melee** 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target grants combat advantage to you until the start of your next turn.
Level 21: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: Until the start of your next turn, you gain a +2 power bonus to *warden's fury* damage rolls.

Level 1: Encounter Attack Evocation

Stinging Nettles

Your fey companions are easily distracted from the threats you face, so it takes something significant to hold their attention. *Fey barrage* focuses your companions long enough to nail down your foes.

Stinging Nettles — Warden Attack 1

An aggressive strike signals your fey allies to launch tiny missiles into the enemies' midst.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Weapon
Standard Action — **Close** blast 2
Target: One enemy adjacent to you in the blast
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage, and each other enemy in the blast takes damage equal to your Strength modifier.
Effect: Each enemy in the blast is marked by you until the end of your next turn.

Level 2: Utility Evocation

Call Faerie Guardian

Call faerie guardian proves your companions' friendship and support, because with it you can lock down even distant foes.

Call Faerie Guardian — Warden Utility 2

A bright light answers your call and heralds the faerie guardian's arrival. The diminutive warrior flutters near your foe while worrying it with feints and strikes.

Daily ✦ Conjuration, Primal
Minor Action — **Ranged** 5
Effect: You conjure a faerie guardian in an unoccupied square within range. The faerie lasts until the end of the encounter or until you dismiss it as a minor action. As a minor action, you can move the faerie up to 5 squares.
Whenever you use your Nature's Wrath class feature, one enemy adjacent to your faerie guardian also becomes marked by you until the end of your next turn.

Level 6: Utility Evocation

Fey Congress

The *fey congress* evocation draws your diminutive companions near to you. While it persists, the fey dance and flit, their mocking laughter and flickering forms wreaking havoc on your foes' attacks.

Fey Congress — Warden Utility 6

Tiny glowing fey folk flit and caper through the air around you. Their movements make it difficult for distant enemies to see you.

Daily ✦ Primal, Zone
Minor Action — **Close** burst 1
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies treat the zone as lightly obscured terrain.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists.

Level 10: Utility Evocation

Sylvan Trickery

You can beseech the fey folk to use their magic to aid you. The *sylvan trickery* evocation grants the fairies primal magic as an offering, to which they respond by casting a spell of their own.

Sylvan Trickery — Warden Utility 10

Your faerie allies cloak you in fey magic to hide you and speed you away.

Daily ✦ Illusion, Primal, Teleportation
Minor Action — **Melee** 1
Target: You or one ally
Effect: The target becomes invisible until the end of his or her next turn or until he or she makes an attack. When the invisibility ends, the target can teleport up to 3 squares.

Level 13: Encounter Attack Evocation

Swarming Fey

If your companions become angered, their joyful play turns sinister. They distract and harass nearby enemies. *Swarming fey* demonstrates just how dangerous these tiny faeries can be.

Swarming Fey — Warden Attack 13

As you bring your weapon about, your fey companions latch onto your enemies, distracting them long enough to give your allies the opening they need to strike.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Weapon, Zone
Standard Action — **Close** burst 1
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies grant combat advantage while in the zone.

Warden Feats

The new feats presented here describe the different ways fey wardens interact with their faerie companions. Many feats are available to any warden, while some are exclusive to specific fey races. As with all feats, any character who meets the prerequisites can take these feats.

WHERE ARE THE STATS?

Someone is bound to ask, "Where's the stat block for the faeries?" There isn't one. The fey creatures these wardens attract are insignificant by themselves. Only when organized by an evocation do they constitute a threat. Once the power takes effect, the fey do as commanded and then break apart. Thus, you don't need statistics.

These fey are minor allies, drawn more to the fey-touched primal energy than the warden's personality. Without feats or powers, they might as well not even be there. If you want to talk with a particular sprite, you're more than welcome to, but you're not likely to get much that's useful. If you take the Fey Companions feat, the fey "speak" to you through the bonus to Nature, Perception, and Streetwise checks.

You want the fey to help you? Any of the accompanying feats demonstrate the sort of aid the fey offer. In short, the relationship you have with these tiny allies depends on how mechanically invested you become in the options presented here.

Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisites.

Dancing Leaves

With a swirl of wings, a group of tiny autumnal-hued fey alight upon you, resembling nothing so much as a flurry of leaves. Before you know it, they've moved you closer to your foe.

Prerequisite: Warden, *warden's grasp* power

Benefit: When you use *warden's grasp,* you can teleport up to 2 squares to a square closer to the target instead of sliding it.

Fey Companions

A glimmering fey creature with sharp eyes whispers in your ear, giving you pointers on various topics of interest and helping you stay focused when another would seek to distract you or control you.

Prerequisite: Any primal class

Benefit: You gain a +1 feat bonus to Nature, Perception, and Streetwise.

In addition, you gain a +2 feat bonus to saving throws against charm effects.

Starshine Mantle

With a quick movement, your fey companions sweep in and blur your form with a hazy, starry glow that expands and makes it hard for your foes to figure out exactly where you are at any given moment.

Prerequisite: Fey Origin racial trait, Warden

Benefit: When you use your second wind, you gain partial concealment until you make an attack or until the start of your next turn.

Sylvan Fury

A flood of fey sweep through the area, poking, prodding, and nipping at your enemy until it moves into your position even as they send you into the one recently vacated by your foe.

Prerequisite: Elf, warden, Nature's Wrath class feature

Benefit: Whenever you use your Nature's Wrath class feature, you can shift 1 square, swapping positions with one enemy adjacent to you that is marked by you.

Swaying Branches

A small brown-hued, twig-haired fey leaps onto your weapon and morphs into a writhing vine.

Prerequisite: Warden, *warden's fury* power

Benefit: Whenever you hit an enemy with your *warden's fury*, you can choose to knock the target prone or slide it 1 square instead of causing damage.

Unseelie Blight

A small stream of dark fey leap onto your foe and start glowing with a sickly green light, providing you with an outline of your intended target or otherwise making it easier for you to hit your foe.

Prerequisite: Drow, warden

Benefit: When you hit an enemy with a warden encounter attack power, the target cannot benefit from any concealment until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose more recent work can be found in *Martial Power 2, Draconomicon 2,* and *Primal Power.* Robert lives in Tennessee.

Illumian Echoes

BY ROBERT J. SCHWALB

illustration by Slawomir Maniak

"Upon breaching the cyan curtain, we found ourselves above a vast sea of rippling dunes whose peaks stirred into scintillating clouds when the winds swept across the landscape. Here and there, structures broke through the white sands. We could see a crumbling city in the distance, its footprint a series of concentric circles. Modest structures stood around its fringes, but further into the city stood tall and majestic buildings, their age and damage evident even from our great distance. The city drew our eye, but Paulus noticed obelisks, statues, and habitation's other signs all around us. Since our stores were low and my men were eager to stretch their legs, we settled Starchaser down just outside the city.

Right away, we knew something was wrong. Aside from the occasional gust, all was still, all was quiet. The buildings closest to us were little more than crumbling walls and only the air moved down the broad avenues. We should have left. We should have quit that city, but my crew was tired, hungry for distraction from the dead we left behind when we fought the githyanki. I at least was cautious enough to send out only a patrol. Paulus chose four able men and they set out. They never returned. I sent another four to find them, and they vanished like the first. We made ready to hit the city in strength to recover our own, but then we saw it—a massive shadow spread across the streets before us, cast by a floating citadel as tall and as broad as a mountain. A deep, ringing noise echoed from its spires, signaling that we were unwelcome. Though I am loath to admit it, we fled. We who remained scrambled onto the ship and lifted off faster than if we were fleeing a dreadnaught. We got away, of course, but no one speaks of that accursed place; no one mentions Paulus because none of us can bear to think about what Shom did to him and his patrol."

Many lights in the Astral Sea have dimmed. The worlds and dominions they represent no longer sparkle against the swirling essence permeating the plane's endless vistas. Such places include Pluton, whose god was slain by the Raven Queen long ago, and the maddening tunnels riddling Pandemonium, once excavated by an insane god in a forgotten time. Countless dominions await exploration and rediscovery across the Astral Sea, but one dominion invites travelers and explorers, raiders and plunderers time and again—Shom. The White Desert has long lured travelers onto its scintillating sands, where magnificent ruins reflect the wisdom and power of the people vanished. Many wonders have escaped the dominion in greedy hands, and many believe that rich treasures remain to be found.

The Illumians

As recounted in *Plane Above,* Shom's cities and structures exist thanks to the illumians who once served the forgotten god of the Word and who carried on his work when he passed beyond death's curtain. Ioun bestowed onto these people two syllables from the Words of Creation, giving one syllable to half the population and the other syllable to the other half. These syllables were too powerful even for these constant stewards; to apprehend both would have destroyed them. Pictograms found on city walls and tombs depict these inheritors as possessing floating sigils, as if the syllables were somehow part of them yet separate, bound to their bodies through the magic they contained. They looked human, but they were more.

The illumian's fate is uncertain. Records from their days were destroyed with the civilization. Some point to Vecna's meddling, while others suggest the illumians' own arrogance as the cause of their undoing. It is even rumored that the illumians beseeched the maruts for assistance, only to have the mercenaries turn against them and destroy them, root and branch. As mysterious as the cause may be, the illumians' annihilation is indisputable. If any survived the cataclysm, they were flung to the Astral Sea's furthest corners and never seen again.

Though the people are now gone, their works remain. Great treasures linger in secure vaults all across the White Desert. Ancient, crumbling cities, harbor riches beyond description—still guarded by the sentinels charged with protecting them ages ago. Many wonders, from astral diamond caches to potent magic relics, wait to be plucked up by greedy hands, but perhaps the greatest and most prized treasures are the Words of Creation themselves.

Words of Creation

What many know as the Words of Creation are those syllables and utterances hidden within the Supernal language that were once used to give form to substance, to awaken new races in the world between, and to create anything the gods desired. The gods themselves do not guard these words closely, for nothing short of a god can use them to full effect. An exceptional mortal might stumble through the enunciation, but the result will be unexpected and often destructive.

So powerful are these utterances that Ioun would not give the illumians actual words. She only entrusted them with syllables, and as their vanished race suggests, even these gifts may have been too powerful for these enlightened people. The illumians were not content with their gifts but foolishly bound the potent words with others to grow their magic and power, thus hastening their downfall. That these utterances remain in Shom demonstrates the great power they must have contained.

Fleeting Words of Creation

Travelers frequently stumble across syllabic echoes, fragments and whispers that have survived the long centuries since they were first spoken. The echoes might be glowing sigils inscribed on tomb walls, flitting through an empty street, or hovering in the air. Anyone who can speak and read Supernal or Abyssal can claim them and their power.

A fleeting word of creation is a consumable. When uttered, the syllable flashes into existence to hover and orbit a few inches above the user's head for as long as the power holds, usually for an encounter. When the power is exhausted, the sigil winks out as if it had never been.

Syllable of Grace — Level 2 Uncommon

The sigil Uur flares with pale light, lending grace and speed to your movements.

Other Consumable 20 gp

Power (Daily): Free Action. *Trigger:* You roll for initiative. *Effect:* You gain a +2 item bonus to your initiative check. This power is lost when you use the word of creation's consumable power.

Power (Consumable): Minor Action. *Requirement:* You must be able to speak Abyssal or Supernal. *Effect:* You speak the syllable and it orbits your head. You gain a +3 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks and a +3 item bonus to speed until the end of the encounter.

Syllable of Life — Level 13 Uncommon

When Hoon shines, you feel vigorous and youthful, as if no hurt could ever stop you.

Other Consumable 650 gp

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. *Requirement:* You must be able to speak Abyssal or Supernal. *Effect:* You speak the syllable and it orbits your head. Until the end of the encounter, you gain regeneration 10 while your are bloodied.

Syllable of Spirit — Level 19 Uncommon

When you manifest Vaul's brilliant light, your spirit shines with uncommon brightness, making it hard for other enemies to strike you.

Other Consumable 4,200 gp

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. *Requirement:* You must be able to speak Abyssal or Supernal. *Effect:* You speak the syllable and it orbits your head. Until the end of the encounter, you are phasing and gain insubstantial while bloodied.

Syllable of Strength — Level 10 Uncommon

Aesh burns brightly, filling you with uncommon power and strength.

Other Consumable 200 gp

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. *Requirement:* You must be able to speak Abyssal or Supernal. *Effect:* You speak the syllable and it orbits your head. You gain a +6 power bonus to damage rolls until the end of the encounter.

Syllable of Thought — Level 4 Uncommon

Naen's shining beacon clarifies your thoughts, helping you to anticipate danger.

Other Consumable 40 gp

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. *Requirement:* You must be able to speak Abyssal or Supernal. *Effect:* You speak the syllable and it orbits your head. Until the end of the encounter, you never grant combat advantage (unless you use a power or ability that causes you to do so) and you gain a +2 bonus to opportunity attacks.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose more recent work can be found in *Martial Power 2*, *Draconomicon 2*, and *Primal Power*. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Winning Races: Halflings
Overwhelming Passion

By Derek Guder ✦ *Illustration by Spikytiger*

Powerful emotions forge the greatest of heroes, and unusual motivations can transform a character from a typical stereotype into something unique.

The world can be a difficult and cruel place for the little people of the world. Overlooked and pushed aside by the larger and more aggressive races, halflings are expected to put up with what they receive with a friendly smile and a hearty laugh. Not every halfling can live up to the gregarious and chatty stereotype, however. Their passions overwhelm them and they cannot laugh away the injustices of the world. Many a dwarf or dragonborn is taken aback when he or she sees the fire rise in the eyes of his or her diminutive foe.

Some halflings are consumed by darker emotions: They are jealous at more prosperous races or are motivated by anger and resentment at what they see as oppression at the hands of those larger than they. They have suffered discrimination or seen their villages wiped aside in the name of "progress," and the sting festered and grew into an overpowering passion. Dwelling on the situation can keep them from anything resembling a normal life and drive them to fight for recognition and extract their revenge on the world they believe abandoned them. Or perhaps it helps them justify seeking a rich life they believe was unfairly denied them.

Other halflings are more self-serving (or "pragmatic," they would claim). They see a world stacked against them—the game is rigged so that they will lose. They might see no point in trying to fight against

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those odds. Surviving an orc horde or duergar raid can leave scars that last a lifetime, and fear is a powerful motivator. Is anywhere safe? Can anyone be trusted? The only people who can understand are others who have gambled with their lives and who lived only through the strength of their arms and the speed of their wits.

Even benign motivations can drive halflings to extremes. Desperate for acceptance or terrified of losing more people to the whims of fate, halflings can become possessive and overprotective. Nosing their way into every aspect of their allies' lives, they live up to the stereotype until they believe their companions are threatened in any way, at which point they undergo a startling transformation into uncharacteristic viciousness.

Similarly, curiosity and wanderlust are almost universal among halflings, but some are completely consumed by these traits and cannot leave anything be in their quest to discover what's around the next bend. No stone is left unturned—no chest unopened or book unread—no matter the consequences. Experiencing the new is a need for these halflings, and they constantly and voraciously consume everything they come across in their wish to continually explore and push the boundaries around them.

A Darker Twist on the Common Halfling

Powerful emotions forge the greatest of heroes, and unusual motivations can transform a character from a typical stereotype into something unique. A powerful temper fueled by simmering resentment can surprise the other characters when your halfling's veneer of control breaks, or the character could be out of control all the time, completely playing against type. The racial stereotype could be taken to the extreme, with chattiness and curiosity becoming a compulsion rather than being a quirk.

When looking for a unique background motivation for a halfling that doesn't depart too far from the norm, you can co-opt some of that typical stereotype. Curiosity is a common halfling trait and might already drive many an adventuring party to distraction, but it can be transformed into an obsession or compulsion as well. Consider giving your halfling a driving curiosity about specific subjects: a thirst for the arcane can lend an otherworldly or Lovecraftian taint to a halfling—even one that doesn't wield magic. Similarly, wanderlust might drive a halfling to scout around a bit when he or she should be keeping watch.

And halflings are no less susceptible to dark urges than any human, dwarf, or elf—the rotten ones just sport a wider smile while they lie. A halfling rogue could be driven by greed or envy as easily as any vague motivation to "do good," and this motivation provides a simple counterpoint to the classic archetype. Tragic halfling heroes motivated to head out on a great adventure due to bottled-up anger or a desire for vengeance can carry as much gravitas as any other race. Perhaps the drow strike at the surface world through halfling warrens that dug to deep or the campaign's evil overlord has taken to forcing halflings into bondage as servants. Your character has survived—and been scarred by—these horrors. Your character might still smile broadly, but he or she has never forgotten and won't rest until he or she claims vengeance.

No matter the character motivation, remember it both in and outside combat. Even simple actions in combat (for example, movement and deciding which enemies to attack) can help provide characterization with brief descriptions or commentary. Similarly, characters with powerful motivations can help move the story along outside a fight or add some twists and complications.

Always respect your fellow players as you roleplay. A tragic backstory isn't interesting when it requires the game to stop for you to hog the spotlight and explain everything. Nor should "I'm just roleplaying what my character would do!" be necessary as a justification when your "entertaining complication" is an "incredibly aggravating screw-up" to everyone else. If roleplaying your character's greed or curiosity is going to ruin everyone else's fun, then perhaps it's time to exercise some restraint instead or do it in a subdued way where you intentionally allow someone to spot your character's plan and stop it before he or she can go too far.

Backgrounds

Here are background elements for halflings.

Desperate Loner: Your wide, easy smile hides a deep-seated insecurity and fear of abandonment. Whatever the limits of your heroism, you find it nearly impossible to trust those closest to you. You are torn between a desperate need to belong and a certainty that, ultimately, everyone will abandon you when you need them. Torn between these extremes, you are gregarious and friendly—annoyingly so—but you also have a dark, pessimistic undercurrent that many fail to perceive.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Insight

Refugee: Maybe an orc horde rampaged through your valley or a militant dragonborn army marched on the nearby kingdom of tieflings—the ambitions and conflicts of the larger nations around you displaced you (and possibly your entire family) from your homeland, driving you out from everything you knew. Were you forced to take up a seminomadic existence, moving from town to town and looking for a new place to finally call home? Did you end up in a ghetto or refugee camp in another nation? How did you survive those willing to prey upon the weak and helpless who have nowhere else to go?

Associated Skills: Endurance, Stealth

Slave: You were kept as a slave or indentured servant and forced to do menial labor for those more privileged. You escaped or, through some whimsical turn of fate, were freed, but your experience has left a telling mark on you. You find it difficult to trust and you still harbor a simmering resentment to your oppressors. Does your hatred extend to their entire race—or to all humanoids larger than you?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Endurance

Feats

These feats can help provide mechanical backing to an emotional character concept. Most are tied to either being bloodied or to the use of the *second chance* halfling racial power. As a fight wears on and the character becomes bloodied or narrowly escapes death, his or her inner convictions rise more strongly to the surface—the character might tap an inner strength that could surprise everyone. Or perhaps the character sees red as his or her anger spirals out of control.

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisites.

Bloodied Triumph

As you twist and turn to avoid an attack, you ensure that if your dodge fails to deceive your enemy, it at least forces it into a poor defensive position. If you survive the strike, you are ready to counterattack. This sort of bold tactic is rare among halflings, as it requires a focus and resolve few expect among your kind.

Prerequisite: Halfling, *second chance* racial power

Benefit: When you use *second chance* while bloodied, you and your allies gain combat advantage against the triggering attacker until the end of your next turn.

Bloodied Vengeance

While halflings have a reputation for evasion and guile, you harbor a rage that could put a frothing half-orc berserker to shame. When you are cornered, your desperate attempts to dodge and weave give way to a fiery anger.

Prerequisite: Halfling, *second chance* racial power

Benefit: When you use *second chance* while bloodied, you gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls until the end of your next turn. If the triggering attack still hits you, this bonus increases to +4.

About the Author

Derek Guder lives in the Seattle area and works his days for Gen Con. He's a hater and a fighter and speaks a unique dialect of English that sounds remarkably like a string of expletives to the untrained ear.

Winning Races: Elves

Tanathriel, School of Elven Wizardry

By Matt Sernett
Illustration by Spikytiger

When folk speak in awed tones of the wizardry of elves, they refer to the spellcasting prowess of eladrin. The mighty arcane arts wielded by the eladrin overshadow the nuanced spellcasting of their sylvan cousins. Yet for all its subtlety, elven practice of the art proves no less powerful. Elves typically use their arcane magic to cloak their homes in illusion and turn enemies away with enchantment, but when called for, they can rain destruction down upon foes with equal skill, if less abandon, than their eladrin cousins.

Many elves—and some eladrin—learn their subtle art from the masters at one school, or from traditions learned from that school. This place of learning lies at the root of many legends and hides at the edges of the histories of many great elf heroes. It is famous among elf wizards, infamous to their enemies, and thought mythical by most.

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The Castle of Dreams

One note of its music carried to the ear by a trick of the air, one memory-laden scent from its gardens drifting to the nose, one glimpse of a single glimmering tower through the trees—that's all it takes. Those who experience it become rapt in a reverie of bliss. They are rooted to the spot and bound by wonder as surely as if an enchantress held their hearts in her hands.

Tanathriel, the Castle of Dreams, strikes awe in all who see it. Even its masters, aged wizards who've taught generations of elves the secrets of their spellcraft, avert their eyes from its beauty as they approach, focusing their attention upon cataloging the reagents in their pockets or upon remembering the order of spellbooks on distant shelves. Such tedious tasks prove a ward against the pleasant intrusion of the castle's beauty into their senses.

Like all the most efficacious enchantments and illusions, the glamour that encompasses Tanathriel has at its foundation a truth: Tanathriel is a place of magnificent loveliness. The slender towers of the castle twist gracefully into the air, each seemingly made of ivory wrapped around pearl, brightly glistening in the dimmest starlight. They rise like the tines of a crown around the central structures of the edifice, each its own dream cut from stone and grown from seed. The Great Apadana at Tanathriel's heart stands as a forest of smooth pillars growing upon rolling hills of marble. The branches of the pale trees that form the columns entwine high above into an exquisite lattice crowned by leaves the hue of the sky just before dawn. While below, the roots crawl and interconnect across the stone, running like rivulets of water until they finally sink into the moist earth. The Arcanium looms behind this sculpture of living wood and white marble, like a pale mountain, itself the trunk of a massive white-barked tree heaped and rounded over centuries of growth into terraces and caverns. Its branches grow like trees from the trunk, forming copses and scenes of serene beauty along the paths that wend their way up its exterior to the various halls and levels of the Veiled Academy and other teaching chambers.

Yet the naturalistic charms of Tanathriel extend far beyond its walls. The Gardens of Memory swaddle the mighty structure in a vale decorously crowded with flowering plants of all hue and season. The scents and sights of the flowers and fruits in the garden mix and play upon the mind, drawing thoughts unbidden to each who pass through it. On walking the garden's winding paths, one cannot help but reminisce about moments from the past, whether the happy remembrance of a cider-soaked autumn evening or of a nightmare of moldering flesh and fresh blood. Here the elves of Tanathriel go to meditate and study, selecting a spot for the memories it evokes and using it to aid their recall of spells or to push their thoughts to particular events as they rest.

The wonders of Tanathriel remain a dream for most due to the great illusion that cloaks it. Situated in a deep valley in the forest, the mirage of a great lake covers it. Even the tallest towers of the castle still lie deep beneath the murky surface of the lake's cold waters. The powerful wizardry that cloaks the Castle of Dreams fools the creatures of the forest. Deer graze the grasses at its edge, drink its water, and roam away sated—at least for a time. Ducks splash down through its surface, sinking and struggling away, perhaps confused by a glimpse of the towers in the murk below. Those who don't know its enchantment might swim or boat out over the water, but cold current appears to keep them near shore, and when they emerge, they are dry and warm soon after, unwilling to brave the chilly and fishless waters of the lake again. The elves that study in Tanathriel make certain none observe their comings and goings, but were one to see it, it would appear as though the elves emerged as though swimming up from below, dripping with water, and when they return to Tanathriel, they appear to wade out into the depths.

Study at the Castle of Dreams

Elves who seek to learn wizardry can do little better than to apprentice at Tanathriel. The Castle of Dreams is justly famous among eladrin communities as a place of mighty magic and great knowledge.

The masters of Tanathriel teach all aspects of wizardry, but most of what's taught focuses upon the sister schools of illusion and enchantment. These two disciplines share much in common with one another on a philosophical level, each beguiling creatures rather than blasting them to slivers or wrenching their souls from their bodies. Also, both schools provide magic unlikely to destroy the forests the elves so dearly love.

The four masters of illusion and their aides teach in the Veiled Academy. Hidden in the shelter of the Arcanium, the Veiled Academy sets itself apart from the other classrooms, libraries, ritual chambers, and potions labs in the vast tree by means of a confusing array of secret chambers and disguised halls. Every apprentice's first challenge each day is to manage a way through the constantly changing maze, which is both real and illusory, in time for classes.

The three masters of enchantment prefer to orate in the Great Apadana or to take their students out into the Garden of Memory for instruction. The true proof of enchantment magic lies in its effectiveness against foes, and so these open spaces provide for dynamic tests of the potential wizards' abilities against summoned creatures and animate objects set upon them by the masters. Rarely, the students leave Tanathriel in the company of a master and seek out a ravening beast of the woods upon which to try their spells. Such field trips can be dangerous, and bringing any creature, charmed or not, back to Tanathriel is strictly prohibited.

Students at the Castle of Dreams are in a place of pleasant entrapment. The beauty of each moment, the exquisiteness of each awed intake of breath, the sense of safety provided by the illusory lake, the exhilarating exchange of knowledge for knowledge's sake—all this and more contribute to an individual's desire to forget the world outside Tanathriel. Some students forget their studies, losing themselves for hours or days in the Garden of Memory. Others stay in apprenticeship for decades, never venturing out of the glamour of Tanathriel, growing old as the aides of masters who have gone out into the world to practice their arts.

Personalities of Tanathriel

Elves and eladrin come from distant lands and the Feywild to study at the Castle of Dreams. In its long history—the seed of the Arcanium's foundation having been planted when eladrin first began to learn magic—Tanathriel has admitted a few half-elves and some gnomes, but these exceptions where made for special individuals. Only those who can appreciate the importance of Tanathriel and its secrecy can be allowed to know its location and see more than a glimpse of the fabled place. To the masters who run the school for wizards that means elves and eladrin—and only those whose families are known and who can be trusted to abide by custom, law, and the masters' edicts.

Below are a few of the folk one might meet who count among those welcome to walk in the vale of Tanathriel.

Quelenna Mistshadow, Master of Illusion

Quelenna Mistshadow, or Mistress Mistshadow as her students know her, serves as one of the four masters of illusion. She specializes in phantasms and other illusions visible only in the minds of certain individuals on whom they are cast. Each person sees Mistress Mistshadow as a different person—a magic unique to Quelenna and which has puzzled her fellow masters of illusion endlessly. Whether anyone has ever seen her true face, or even if she is an eladrin as she claims and not a gnome or a darker creature, none can say without resorting to powerful prying divinations—something that not even the most foolish student has resorted to due to the deep respect all feel for the wise and amiable Mistress Mistshadow.

Mistress Mistshadow asks those she meets how she appears to them, because she says that how they see her reveals more about them than it does of herself. Of course, many believe Quelenna knows how she appears to each person but learns much from how individuals react to her probing and how they describe what they see.

Varis Winterleaf, Thrice Master of Illusion

Tetchy and egotistical, Varis Winterleaf has served as a master of illusion for over a century. Having gained the title as a precocious youth, he has kept it for more than thrice the traditional tenure, fending off challenges to his mastery with such vicious cleverness that none have dared attempt to take his place despite two decades of having the option to do so. Varis has a more fearsome reputation as a teacher, demanding such perfection and dedication from his students that many have given up on spellcasting altogether. Despite this, students compete for the honor of being chosen as one of his apprentices. Those with the will and the skill to survive his tutelage with their egos intact become famous illusionists.

No one knows what time might have wrought upon Varis's body, but he still appears as he did sixty years ago. His stern gaze is framed by dark hair worn long down the sides and tied back in a severe topknot.

Aelar Silversun, Master of Enchantment

Aelar Silversun presents a suave demeanor and cuts a fine figure in his immaculate clothing. He plainly seeks to charm others without, as he is happy to tell anyone, resorting to the use of magic. Somehow his bald attempt to befriend everyone avoids being unctuous and largely succeeds with everyone despite their potential reservations. Aelar never forgets a name or face, and he is ever ready with a compliment or comment of friendly concern.

One of three masters of enchantment, Aelar sits in judgment, along with his fellow masters, of the one who wishes to be the fourth. The past fourth

master, Tellus Tiemantle, was charmed and slain by a succubus someone summoned into Tanathriel. Although the masters and some students slew the devil and swiftly quieted the matter, the mystery of who brought the devil into the Castle of Dreams and if it was directed at Master Tiemantle intentionally remains a topic much whispered about by students.

Thorncrown and Thistle

One tree in the Garden of Memory does not flower or produce fruit or nuts. The tree is out of place due to its ugliness. A twisted and gnarled behemoth of cracked black bark liberally studded with thick thorns, it bears small leaves so deeply red as to approach purple. A beautiful elf maiden frequently sits in the shadow of this blight on the beauty of the garden, happily whiling away the hours making daisy chains or tending to nearby plants.

As one might expect in a place known for illusion and enchantment, all is not as it seems. The elf, who calls herself Thistle, and her favored tree move throughout the Garden of Memory and walk through the garden together. The tree, when it chooses to speak, calls itself Thorncrown, and it is a treant, while Thistle is in truth a dryad. The two have lived at Tanathriel for decades and are counted as favorite friends by many students. Both know a surprising amount about what goes on in Castle of Dreams and its surrounding gardens. Thistle, in particular, can share many insights about illusion and enchantment, which allows her to act as an aide to masters of both schools and substitute for them in lessons when duties call the masters elsewhere. Many new students unwittingly fall for Thistle when they do not know her true nature, and others fall under her spell despite knowing it due to Thistle's natural and supernatural charms. Suitors must be wary however. Thorncrown jealously protects Thistle and pitilessly brutalizes anyone who troubles Thistle too much, regardless of friendship or standing in the school.

The masters and their most trusted aides and students know a secret about the pair of fey beings. A gateway to the Feywild lies within Thorncrown's prickly boughs, and Thistle's blood is its key. How this came to pass is a mystery to all but the two of them, and those who wish to use the passage should avoid asking about it lest they rouse Thorncrown to anger.

Tanathriel and Your Character

You can have your character become involved with Tanathriel in a number of ways.

Seeking Tanathriel: Your character might have heard of Tanathriel and be seeking it for some reason. Perhaps you have one *heart-touch bracelet* (see the sidebar) and you've learned that whoever wears its twin is in Tanathriel. Alternatively, a villain from your past might be hiding out in Tanathriel, a scholar there might have knowledge you need, or you might seek the place to learn from the great masters of magic there.

Visiting Tanathriel: When you visit Tanathriel you can engage in a number of different pursuits. You might use its libraries for research, seek training, consult its masters for their knowledge of magic, look into the mystery of the darker twin of Tanathriel that is called Salarquiel (see the heart-touch bracelet sidebar for more on this location), try to influence the choice of the fourth master of enchantment, have a curse or charm removed, seek the aid of an apprentice in your adventures, or use its passage to the Feywild.

A Background at Tanathriel: If you're playing a mage who specializes in enchantment or illusions, you might have gained your skills in Tanathriel. Even if you're not an elf or eladrin, you might be one of the rare exceptions the elves sometimes make for those trustworthy folk with true talent. You might also be a member of another class that uses arcane magic who began studies at Tanathriel but chose a different path than wizardry.

As an elf or eladrin of virtually any class, you might have served as a guardian of Tanathriel. You could have been stationed outside the border of the vale in which it resides, always on the lookout for creatures that somehow pass through the illusion of the lake and enter the magical valley uninvited. Alternatively, perhaps you're not an elf or eladrin but hail from an indebted caste of guardians of another race assigned to guard Tanathriel's borders from outside. You might never have seen more of the Castle of Dreams than the lake that disguises it despite years of service.

If you have been inside Tanathriel before, whom do you know best among its cast of characters? What friends or rivals might you have among its students and faculty? Were you trained by one of the characters mentioned above, or did you study under another master (whom you can make up)?

If you have a background at Tanathriel, the associated skills are Arcana and Nature.

TANATHRIEL STAFF

The masters of Tanathriel focus their magical training upon the use of the staff as an implement. Beyond the staff's practical uses as a weapon and walking stick, the masters of Tanathriel use staffs as symbols of their offices. Students at the school practice with staffs as implements and carry staffs similar to those masters under which they apprentice. Those students strong enough in the arts to warrant the position of aide to a master are rewarded with a magic staff particular to the Castle of Dreams. These *Tanathriel staffs* are useful to aides in defending against the magic the masters teach.

Tanathriel Staff — Level 2+ Common

This wood and bronze staff feels right in your hands but at the same time dreamlike and unnaturally light, as if only partially real. Its power protects you from illusions and enchantments.

Lvl 2	+1	520 gp	Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp
Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Implement (**Staff**)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, and you and allies within 5 squares of you can make a saving throw.
Property: While wielding the staff, you gain an item bonus to saving throws against charm and illusion effects equal to the enhancement bonus of the item.

Heart-Touch Bracelets — Level 2 Uncommon

These elegant gold bracelets feel warm to the touch. As soon as you don one, you feel the vacancy of the other until it too is worn and your bracelet beats with the pulse of another heart.

Item Slot: Arms 520 gp
Property: When you wear one of these bracelets, you are aware if the other bracelet of the pair is worn. If that person's heart beats, you feel it in your bracelet, allowing you to know how fast or slow the person's heart is beating. In addition, you gain a +2 bonus to Insight checks made against the wearer of the other bracelet, and you are aware if that person is bloodied, stunned, dazed, or unconscious.

The wearer of the other bracelet in the pair is aware of the same things in regard to you as long as you wear the *heart-touch bracelet.*

HEART-TOUCH BRACELETS

Although Aelar Silversun claims to have invented these magic bracelets, a persistent rumor among the students of Tanathriel places their creation in the so-called "Castle of Nightmares," the sister school to Tanathriel dedicated to the study of necromancy and conjuration. Named Salarquiel, this other college of wizardry vanished roughly a century ago. The masters of Tanathriel remain tight-lipped about where it went and how it disappeared, and they emphatically deny that necromancy plays any part in the creation of heart-touch bracelets.

These magic bracelets come in pairs. The wearer of one feels the heartbeat of the person who wears the other through a slight squeezing pulse. Those who wear such bracelets for an extended period find their hearts beat in synchronization. Lovers wear such bracelets as a sign of loyalty, but the bracelets also allow each wearer to tell when the other's heart runs fast due to some excitement or slow such as when sleeping or unconscious.

About the Author

Matt Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who splits his time between Dungeons & Dragons® and Magic: The Gathering. Recent credits include Player's Handbook Races: Tieflings, *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*, and *Magic the Gathering: Zendikar.* When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.

The Forge of Xen'drik

By Kay Kenyon
Illustration by Steve Prescott

Ravon Kell slammed his shovel into the stony ground, cursing the hard jungle soil. They had already buried fifty slaves, and there was no end in sight.

The sun threw lashing rays on his back, cooking him in his rags, but the worst heat came from the ground itself, where the grinding magics of the genesis forge blistered the land, killing the jungle for a swath of a thousand feet around their prison.

Nearby an orc guard wrinkled his snout at the stench of bodies. "Bury 'em three in a hole," he ordered the halfling Finner.

"That's against–," Finner started to protest, but fell silent as the orc loomed over him.

Ravon dug his hole deeper. Yesterday's slave uprising had been doomed from the start. An army officer in the Last War, he'd weighed the odds and had stayed out of the fray. It wasn't even a contest, here in this lost jungle of Xen'drik where no one knew there *was* a forge or slaves—both illegal under the Treaty of Thronehold.

Maybe the poor bastards knew the odds and just wanted to die. As the old marching song went, there were nine hundred and ninety ways to die. An orc's blade thrust being merely one.

He looked up at the massive factory: an arms mill the size of a fortress; soon to produce an endless supply of lances, shields, cudgels, maces, swords, crossbows, spears—not to mention magic-infused spike wire, lightning spheres, and thunder shock implements.

A genesis forge, by the Devourer, though one had not been seen in the world since the fall of Cyre, as they were forbidden by the Treaty of Thronehold. But those laws didn't apply in Xen'drik, a wild continent far from Khorvaire. Besides, a cloak of invisibility hid the forge. From the jungle, the misshapen fortress looked like nothing more than a vine-covered crag, not a hulking factory ten stories high, with massive iron walls studded with bulging armories and effluent towers disgorging steam and rank smoke.

At the top of the forge bulged the dome of the artificers' keep. There, mages with their diagrams, spells, and sigils directed the magical workings of the forge. They drew enormous power from stockpiles of dragonshards and from the latent magic of the very ground on which the forge rested—an ancient giant burial site, it was said.

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Ravon spat. His task—the task of every other slave, guard, and artificer—was to bring the forge to working order, and by so doing, bring the world to war. As a captain in Karrnath's army, war had been his job, but he would never fight again. In the Last War Count Vedrim ir'Omik had throw him in the dungeons, stripping him of his commission and very nearly his life. It was one thing to take his punishment like a man, and quite another to take it when innocent of the charges—charges trumped up by the count's favorite vixen, at that. Earlier in the war a few of Ravon's victories had come to the count's attention, but by the Nine Hells, he wished that Vedrim had never visited the battlefield with his entourage. The attractive lady had taken a fancy to the celebrated captain, he'd declined to bed her, the count had been led to believe otherwise, and now Ravon wished that for all he'd suffered in the dungeon, he'd at least had the pleasure of what he'd been accused of.

High up the outer wall, a flat ring protruded like a horizontal embedded plate. Two rings, actually, one within the other. They turned very slowly, in opposite directions, grinding the dragon shards—the raw material of the forge's magic.

On the outer ring, pacing slowly to keep the slaves in view, the forge master Stonefist glared down at them. Even among gnolls, he was especially ugly. Strutting up there on the outer ring, his presence filled the slaves with further dread, a fact that even the slow-witted gnoll well understood.

Finner pulled out a gourd from inside his shirt, offering Ravon a drink of hoarded water.

Ravon waved it away. "Drink it yourself."

"You first, Captain." Finner bent over with another of his coughing spells, but managed not to spill.

Ravon wiped the sweat streaming into his eyes. "I'm not your captain anymore." He glared at Finner. "And I don't need a steward. Get to digging or that orc will put *you* in a hole."

The halfling still held out the gourd. "You'll always be a captain of Karrnath. Don't make no difference, prisons or digging graves."

Ravon took the gourd, else there would be no shutting Finner up. Tossing off a gulp of water, he nodded at the halfling, getting a worshipful look in return. To his surprise, it shamed him. There was nothing left to look at that way. He'd left that man in the count's dungeons. They had beaten and tortured that man out of him, and then had made him do the same to others.

So, Finner, he thought, how do you like the real Ravon Kell?

* * *

Ravon entered the forge through the iron jaws of the front door. The inner maze of ramps and halls growled with a low throbbing, less heard than felt through the soles of the feet. The goblin who'd fetched Ravon prodded him with a spear. Ravon batted it away from the small of his back, heedless of the goblin's snarl. No one was going to cut him down before Stonefist said. Ravon's time had not yet come, and the goblin knew it.

He tramped up the stairs leaving the guard to return to grave duty. Ravon had more freedom than most of the other workers. Stonefist had conceived the plan to save him for a showy death. Why waste the great captain of Karrnath on starvation or overwork? Maybe Stonefist's sadistic plan was ready to go, if the gnoll wanted to see him.

Second level, the rat pen. Gnomes and dwarves and halflings ran in their caged circles, turning the great forge rings that wove the spell to cloak the forge from prying eyes. Every kingdom in Khorvaire would rise up to destroy the forge, if discovered. That wasn't going to happen, though Ravon in his off-guard moments hoped for it. Hope made servitude less bearable, a lesson he'd learned well in Vedrim's dungeon.

A female dwarf grown thin from the endless walk spat through her cage and landed a gobbet at Ravon's feet. "Think you're high and mighty, don't you? Foul slime!"

Ravon made a half salute. "Good day to you as well, Bisreth."

Others doing cage duty took up the catcalls. "Lackey." "Traitor." They thought he was in close with Stonefist; even *liked* the forge master. The very thought gagged him. It was true that Stonefist gave him the run of the place, within reason. Ravon provided entertainment for Stonefist—and banter the forge master had come to relish.

The thought festered that he was also a model slave, dependably doing what he was told. Once, he would have called such a man a craven coward. Well. Perhaps one day Stonefist would push him too far, and he'd show himself a man, after all.

Snapping whips in the air, the goblin guards silenced the rat pen outburst, ignoring Ravon as he passed through.

Arriving at the third level, Ravon found Stonefist waiting for him. The gnoll was seated next to a wall of the forge proper. The ten-story heart of the edifice sweated out a putrescent goo in spots. This was the *bowel room*, slave talk for the place where the forge shat out its weapons. Or would, come the word from on-high. Some high lord or other, but such things mattered little in the end. What mattered to Ravon

was a decent death. He'd put more than his share of thought into choosing a good one.

Seeing Ravon approach, Stonefist kicked at the cringing slave filing his toenails. "Enough!" he roared. She fled the room. At Stonefist's side stood an elf, the ever-watchful, the ever-grim Nastra, a bulging ring of colorful keys at her belt.

Noting Stonefist's daggerlike toe nails, Ravon said appreciatively, "Nice job. Except for the stink. Need to wash those feet sometime, boss." Over the weeks he and Stonefist had fallen into an exchange of insults. The gnoll was doubtless stirred by verbal abuse from a man he could torture to death at a whim.

Stonefist grinned. "Maybe you lick feet?" He turned his foot to one side, then the other. "Lick clean?"

Ravon gave an elaborate sigh. "A slave's work is never done."

"No slaves!" Stonefist blared. "Slaves against the law."

"Well, if not slaves, how about *happy workers?*"

Stonefist roared a laugh. "Happy workers!" He socked his fist against the forge wall, leaving a dent. "Happy workers!" Even Nastra smirked. "Big boss will like happy workers," the gnoll said, his good mood growing.

"You never said who the big boss is, Stonefist."

"Hah! Big boss is . . ." His grin fell away. "But Stonefist don't tell."

A flicker of interest flamed high in Ravon. It would be good to know one's real enemy. But it was a soldier's instinct, and he was no longer a soldier.

"I save you from shovels, Captain," the gnoll said. "Not die of too much work. Stonefist save captain for *commmmbaaat*," he said, as his eyes grew rapturous.

Nastra made a distorted smile.

"Maybe I won't do your combat," Ravon said lightly. He'd been wondering what he *would* do when Stonefist ordered him to fight. It might not be a bad way to die: Ravon against a few orcs and goblins. But then again, it would mean contributing to Stonefist's sadistic pleasures.

The forge master frowned. "Then captain die. I cut your heart out."

No heart in there, Ravon thought, but have at it, you sack of pus.

The pleasantries concluded, Stonefist heaved himself from his chair. Ravon was a big man, but the forge master stood a foot taller.

"Stonefist show you a thing, yah?" Waving Ravon to follow, he lumbered toward one of the forge portals.

"Foul bitch," Ravon muttered to Nastra as she walked by his side. Skinnier even than most elves, she still possessed a fluidity that might be called grace, if she hadn't been a sadistic freak of a gnoll's minion.

"I pissed on your bed this morning," Nastra crooned. "Think of me tonight as you dream." As she walked, her hundred keys clinked like bells.

"I *do* think of you. You perform all my delights, lady elf. Think of *that*."

She hissed in response. Oh, how the vile creature would love to carve him up a little with the handy knife on her belt. It was one of Ravon's few remaining pleasures to provoke her. Even Stonefist liked to see her taken down a notch.

They came to the egress gate in the forge wall, the place where the weaponry would soon exit. To Ravon's surprise, the process had begun.

A great, burnished sword blade, edges honed and glittering, protruded from a portal. The blade was emerging from the door so slowly that Ravon could barely tell it was moving. A tendril of smoke slipped out as well, as though the forge was passing intestinal gas at the effort. But it was still in testing mode. Ravon tried and failed to imagine the hellish environs of a fully enlivened genesis forge.

Stonefist eyed Ravon. "You fight my goblins with sword, yah? Kill and kill, to see if sharp?"

Stonefist had long promised Ravon a good fight with the forge's first product. A little celebration, as it were. With this weapon, by the look of the sword's ensorcelled iron, Ravon might last a few minutes even if out-numbered. But he said: "I'd rather fight *you*, Stonefist. Someone easy." He shrugged. "If it were up to me."

Stonefist's expression darkened. He bent over Ravon, pointing a meaty finger at his chest, his breath fit to knock Ravon flat. "You kill goblins. You kill what I say you kill." His voice boomed. "You kill lady elf. You kill halfling Finner. Whoever Stonefist say!"

Lightly bringing the gnoll's attention back to the sword, Ravon asked, "When will it be ready?"

"Soon," the gnoll muttered. Then, regaining his mood, he said, "How you like sword?"

"Good so far," Ravon said.

Stonefist nodded over and over, muttering half to himself, "Took much dragonshards. Two years of dragonshards to make. Big pile. Now out come good-so-far sword! Ha!" Stonefist threw wide his massive arms. "Soon come big important visitor. He watch forge get born!"

That was news. The high lord coming. Ravon flicked a glance at Nastra, whose long and almost handsome face showed no sign of surprise, only a patient, cold longing to watch a captain of Karrnath fight to the death. Well, she hadn't overseen the killing of any slaves for a couple of days.

Ravon wondered who the big visitor would be. Wondered if he would live to see it. Hoped he wouldn't. "You'll need a bath, then, Stonefist." Ravon said. "With company coming."

Stonefist grinned, showing an impressive rack of teeth. "By Dolurrh, Stonefist miss you when you dead!" That brought on a fit of barking laughter. Even Nastra joined in, as ugly a mewling sound as Ravon had ever heard.

He heard Stonefist's guffaws all the way up to the fourth level, the slave barracks. Just before he turned into his quarters—by the grace of the Sovereign Host, a private cell—he heard keys jangling and turned to see Nastra slinking around the corner and down the crabbed and steep north stairs. Had she followed him, spying? He wondered where the creature was going. Nowhere to go, surely. This lovely forge was the end of the line.

* * *

Deep in the night, ear-splitting yowls erupted down the fortress corridor. Instantly awake, Ravon sprang from his pallet. From cell block eleven, he heard the rasping shouts of goblins and slaves chanting "Finner, Finner!"

Cursing, Ravon stalked down to the slave barracks in time to see a dozen goblins surrounding a bloodied Finner. One of them yanked a fistful of hair from Finner's head and, grinning, raised it aloft like a captured flag. The slaves stomped and hollered as Finner fell to his knees in a coughing fit.

In the tumult, no one saw Ravon stride in until he grabbed a goblin by his leather belt, holding him a foot off the floor, kicking and growling. He swung the creature around, slamming him into another goblin and clearing a wide swath.

His fit passed. Finner stared at the palm of his hand and a few bloody teeth he'd coughed up. By the Devourer, here was a fine mess. Ravon had promised Finner's lieutenant that he'd keep an eye on the young halfling. Finner had served tirelessly as the officer's steward despite a set of bad lungs that would have kept lesser men from service. Ravon owed it to the lieutenant, he supposed. The man had died in his arms on the battlefield.

Still holding the goblin by the belt, Ravon growled, "Anybody want this sack of shit?"

The goblins fell silent, their grins fading to resentful scowls.

"No?" Ravon flung the creature aside and walked over to Finner. The formerly cheering slaves now looked properly ashamed. To watch a fellow slave savagely beaten . . . Ravon shook his head, glaring at them. The urge rose to slay two or three goblins before the others fell upon him. But then, that would be too much like the old Ravon and it was so much easier not to be him.

He helped Finner back to his private quarters—a rat hole with a slit for a window—and dumped him in a pile of straw.

Finner gazed up at him, but this time without the puppy look. The beating bashed the puppy out of him, no doubt. Still, there was that *gratitude* in his eyes.

"By the Dark Six, get some sleep," Ravon muttered. Then, to escape Finner's groveling, he stalked into the cell warrens, the walls secreting the usual bubbling pustules like a body with the plague. Eventually he found some solitude on a balcony used for dumping refuse. He sat until a glimmer of dawn seeped into the jungle and the blasted ground near the forge. Fumaroles in the cracked land coughed up sulfurous wisps. On the far side of the clearing, an early morning detail was hammering away on something. A reviewing stand. Getting on time for the end of the world. But if the genesis forge was ready to deliver itself of millions of arms, and if it took two years of accumulated magical dragonshards to create half a sword, where were the stockpiles, the hoards of powerful shards and objects of enchantment? He'd dared to ask a forge artificer once, in a rare hallway encounter. The elite mage had wrinkled his nose at Ravon's odor and murmured, "Endless stocks, below. Endless."

He meant the giant graveyard. But somehow Ravon doubted there was enough enchantment below for all that would soon be rolling out of the genesis forge.

A noise startled him. Nastra stood at the door.

He turned back to gaze out over jungle. "So did your goblins report me?"

"Yes."

He shrugged. "Well, they started it."

There was nothing much to say to that, nor did she respond, but rather watched at Ravon's side as the jungle brightened from black to sewage green.

Below them, Stonefist had come out onto the turning rims and with his henchmen flung a helpless gnome off the ring to his death four stories below. Then another. The guards' laughter came trickling up.

"Stonefist's at it early," Ravon muttered.

Nastra remained silent for a moment, before saying, "How bad was Vedrim's dungeon?"

"Not pleasant. No hot and cold running water. Lousy food."

"I'll bet the count has especially creative tortures."

That was true, but he wasn't going to give Nastra any pointers. "It's an art with him."

Another gnome went sailing off the ring to his death. Nastra murmured, "It can make a monster of you."

He turned to her. "What can?"

She stared at him with cold, flat eyes. "Torture."

Was she accusing *him* of monstrosity? He stifled a guffaw. "What's *your* excuse, lady elf?"

"Each to his own, Captain." She nodded at Stonefist and his entourage, below. "You could save a few gnomes, though, if you had a mind to."

Ravon stood up, his peace shattered. "*I'm* not kicking them off the rings. That would be Stonefist, or are you blind as well as dumb?"

"Stonefist knows you're up here. He's throwing the workers off to goad you. Everybody has a breaking point. Our forge master wonders what yours is. Even the slaves are laying wagers." Walking off, she said, "I've got a few coins in the game myself."

When Ravon got back to his cell, Finner had washed out his second set of rags, and hung them up to dry by the window slit. Ravon noted that the cell was newly swept as well. It almost looked decent.

Noting Ravon's scowl, Finner said, "It's what a steward does." Then he turned to pound the dust out of Ravon's mattress.

"Nine Hells." Ravon was now thoroughly stuck with Finner, all four feet of him, including his racking cough and broken ribs.

Finner turned to leave. "I'll fetch your breakfast."

"No!" At the halfling's wide-eyed look, Ravon muttered, "Tell them it's my gruel, but bring it up here and eat it yourself." Finner started to protest. "That's an order. A steward does what he's bloody well told."

Finner grinned with what teeth he had left.

* * *

One night a storm lashed down on the forge. Lightning erupted as though Eberron itself were on fire. It ought to have cooled the forge down, but it only succeeded in turning the warrens into insufferable chambers of steam. Unable to sleep, Ravon left Finner to his exhausted slumbers and walked out to lean against a corridor wall. The thunder was loud enough to wake the dead giants underground. Between bellowing cracks he heard a familiar jangling sound and looked down the corridor to see Nastra heading down the north stairwell—again. He followed.

Ravon was not a small man, but he had long experience with silent tracking, all the easier when walking on stone stairs and iron halls. He followed Nastra down the stairs, open at the top, but increasingly narrow as they continued down. It was a reckless thing, to follow her. She carried a small dagger at her belt, and he'd seen her use it. A blade at the throat . . . the hundred and twelfth way to die, and not as bad as some. Still, Ravon had a hankering to die with a weapon in his hand. Call him sentimental. So Stonefist's promise of a fight with a bunch of his henchmen was always in the back of his mind.

Nevertheless Ravon followed Nastra to see what villainy she was up to. If she broke the rules, he could use it against her when she tormented Finner.

The elf slipped around another turn of the stairs, the descent growing hotter. By now they had surely passed ground level. Ravon hadn't thought there *was* anything past ground level, but down they climbed. Then, from around a landing, he heard a scraping noise.

Peering around the corner, he saw that Nastra had opened a door and, releasing the key back to her collection, she disappeared through it. The door clanged shut behind her.

He was not surprised when he couldn't open it. What surprised him was that when he touched the door it burned his fingers.

* * *

It was the way of the hellish forge that the most interesting things happened at night. Executions, rapes, orc berserker outbreaks—but this night's entertainment was of a different sort.

A guard came for him, and Ravon tramped down to the bowel room at Stonefist's order.

When he saw the purpose of the summons, his heart quickened. Stonefist and Nastra were leaning over the forge maw, as though crooning over a newborn baby.

The sword was complete. Its hilt was heavy with cladding, but nicely wrought. The blade, perfect; the length, a good four feet.

Stonefist lifted it from the receiving tray, holding it up and turning the blade to and fro. "Commmbaaat," the gnoll rumbled. "Yah." He turned his gaze on Ravon. "You hold." He held the sword out, then withdrew it with a sly smile. "But not yet."

"My time has come, then," Ravon said, feeling a rush of relief like a window thrown open and fresh air wafting in.

The gnoll smiled. "When Stonefist say. Maybe tonight. Maybe tomorrow. Stonefist choose."

"But soon."

Stonefist squinted at Ravon, handing the massive sword to Nastra. "But Captain's death must be . . . special. Very sat-is-fying. Nothing . . ." Words failed him.

"Vulgar?" Ravon supplied.

"No vulgar!" the gnoll boomed gleefully, though Ravon doubted he knew what the word meant. "Nothing . . . quick," Stonefist finished.

Nastra locked the blade away in an armory drawer. Ravon realized that she was thinner than ever, wasting away in fact. Maybe she was sick. The night was just filled with happy thoughts.

Now that the main event of the evening, the first weapon from the genesis forge, was done, Stonefist looked for other diversions.

"Lady elf," he said slyly, "forge need more cage-walk. You get halfling Finner." He grinned at Ravon, actually drooling. "Night shift."

Ravon frowned. "He's already done his shift, boss."

"Missed work today." Stonefist put a finger to his forehead. "Stonefist remember. Missing shift."

"Two shifts in the same day will kill him." Ravon shrugged. "A waste of a worker when the very important visitor is coming."

Stonefist paused, processing this idea. Then: "Lady elf: you wake halfling."

Ravon kept his expression neutral. "Means nothing to me. You're the boss."

"Stonefist boss. *Vuulgaaar* boss, yah?"

"Yeah," Ravon said, giving an insolent salute.

Stonefist liked a few military flourishes. But he still sent Nastra up to the barracks.

Soon dismissed, Ravon rushed up the stairs to catch the elf. He found her at the door to his cell. "Nastra," he murmured.

She turned, her face a mask of indifference.

"What's he doing to you? You look worse every day."

Her eyes caught a glint from the everbright lantern high on the wall. "What's it to you?"

Ravon shrugged. "Just wondering why you want to be a lackey for our lovely forge master."

"Maybe I like the work."

That had occurred to Ravon, but he wanted to keep her talking. "Leave Finner alone, Nastra. Show a little mercy. Some day you'll need a favor."

She smiled, showing surprisingly clean teeth, not that it was a pleasant sight. "I thought you didn't care about Finner."

"I don't. But I made a promise in battle to Finner's dying lieutenant. I said I'd watch over his steward. Damned if I know why."

Her dark eyes held his. "It was a promise."

"Yes."

For a moment he thought she might be softening, actually affected by Finner's story. But no, the old sarcasm was at the ready. "Cry me a bucketful," she snapped.

She turned on her heel and stalked away. But, to Ravon's surprise, she let Finner sleep in peace that night.

* * *

The next night Ravon lay in wait for Nastra.

He hid in a recess by the north stairs and, true to habit, the elf skulked by and disappeared down. Nastra was hiding something, he was sure of it.

What he couldn't figure out was why he gave a damn.

In the last six months he'd learned not to care, even relishing the prospect of his own death. But then Finner had become his steward, and in Finner's eyes Ravon had seen the reflection of the man he used to be. Nine Hells. One foot in the grave and now he had hope again . . . not a hope to live—no, never that—but hope to have absolution for all that he'd done.

By the Devourer's Teeth, he wished he'd never met Finner.

But now he was curious. Where did the sovereign bitch go on all these back stair excursions? A lover? His stomach turned at *that* thought.

He watched from a recess in the wall as Nastra stood before the hot door fumbling for her keys. She selected a blood red one and, using it, went through.

Ravon plunged forward, catching the door an inch from closing. He worked the latch so that the elf would hear the mechanism click into place. Then he followed her down.

For down it was, a shaft of a stairwell now steeper than before—and hotter with every step. Here the walls streamed with foul excreta, slick and stinking. It brought to mind the question of *why* the whole forge, not just here, sweated a vile slime. It had always seemed natural to the misery of the place, but now Ravon thought it was something more, perhaps something far worse. The hammering heat itself was a mystery. But the forge was built on top of a graveyard of giants and places of such ancient magic had a natural affinity for the dark places of Khyber, bringing its hellish heat close.

And down, still—with Nastra rounding the corners of the landings, and Ravon one turn behind, just catching a glimpse of her cloak as it disappeared. No lover down here. *Nothing* down here. His curiosity mounted.

Abruptly, the descent ended. Nastra was off across a murky cavern, roiling in noxious fumes. Ghostly rock formations jutted up from the floor while stalactites hung down from above, dripping goo . . . the very pus that infected the forge itself. Ravon followed the elf, the ground thrumming beneath his feet as though the heart of a giant lay just below.

A scream tore through the cavern, stopping Ravon in midstride. The howl trailed off. He couldn't see Nastra, lost in the murk.

Voices. One horrid and low, the other a murmur. Nastra was with someone. That low, guttural voice sent a shudder over him. All senses on keen alert, he moved with practiced stealth toward the source of the voices, using rock formations as cover. That *voice*. Not human, not in any way normal. The list of possible creatures was short and exceedingly nasty; maybe best to slink away now before he risked discovery. Lying flat on the ground behind a massive rock, he crept forward to look.

A creature stood on a rock outcropping. A skeletal, flesh-wasted monster, some seven feet tall.

By all the Six, a death hag. Why had he pulled forward? The hag could probably hear his very breath if she wasn't so focused on Nastra. He was frozen now, lying flat, but exposed.

The death hag jumped down to where Nastra knelt, screaming, "My master does not wait! The baron of Cannith signifies nothing to such as us. My master does not wait for human lords!"

Then the hag slowly craned her neck, looking around. Ravon stopped breathing.

"Yes, exalted," Nastra piped up, bringing the hag's attention back. "Just a day, however. What is a day to your great master? It is nothing!"

The death hag screamed in frustration, raising her hands and wringing them. "A day, a day? You shall understand how long is a day, when my sisters cut a slit in you and slowly draw out your entrails!" The creature swiped her claws through Nastra's hair, snapping the elf's head back and forth. "We shall bring up the fires to feed the engine. Open the pipe! Let the sweet lakes of Fernia flow!"

Ravon heard the word *Fernia*, and his mind opened to a new and most unwelcome surmise.

The hag was still screaming, "Aye, Fernia longs to flow!"

Nastra quailed but answered, "Yes, Fernia shall flow, great one. The glorious day!"

Ravon's heart cooled at the growing realization. By all that was unholy, the forge needn't worry about running out of dragonshards. It was going to have Fernia. It would be fueled by one of the planes of the Elemental Chaos: Fernia, the Sea of Fire.

Because, he now realized, the genesis forge was sitting atop a *manifest zone*, where the worlds intermixed. But not even a death hag could create a pipe to extrude the Elemental Chaos . . .

Nastra looked up at the hag. "A glorious day it will be, but not yet, exalted one. Tomorrow. Stonefist begs the demon lord's indulgence for one more day—"

Her agitation growing, the death hag rolled her eyes fully around in their sockets.

Nastra went on, "—so that *his* master, the great Cannith personage, may arrive, may witness the event."

The death hag emitted a horrid ululation. She bashed her right hand down on her own lower leg, shattering it. Somehow, the witch remained upright. Then she plucked aside her rags and touched her femur, healing it over with gristle. Calmer now after her outburst, the death hag grinned and yanked Nastra to her feet.

"*One day only*, sweetling. The demon lord shall wait *one day*. Then the fire comes up. The forge is born!"

"Yes, exalted lady. Tomorrow. You have my word."

The hag rasped, "What is your word to *me*?"

"Nothing," Nastra said. Then she met the hag's maddened gaze. "But it's all you've got."

The witch cocked her skull-like head, as though considering whether to eat the elf on the spot or save her for another time.

By the Sovereign Gods, Ravon had space in his mind to think, Nastra just talked back to a death hag.

"Leave me," the hag spat, "return tomorrow and tell us Cannith has arrived. Then the gates of fire open!" With a ferocious leap she launched herself away, disappearing into the boiling smoke.

The creature was gone. Even so, Ravon waited a few beats before standing up to face Nastra. He swayed for a moment, temporarily weakened by having been in the death hag's proximity.

Spying him, Nastra's look revealed her dismay. The forge's secrets, or most of them, were now exposed. Her eyes flicked toward the vanished death hag. Then she waved him toward the end of the cavern where the stairs gave on to the audience chamber.

There they stood face to face, eyeing each other. "So," Nastra muttered. "You know."

Ravon looked at Nastra's stringy face and stooped shoulders. Her visits with the death hag had eaten away her life force, until all that was left was this pitiful, wasted creature. He spoke in a stunned whisper. "You're going to unleash the Demon Lords."

"Not exactly."

His temper surged, and he pushed her against the stairwell wall. "No? Isn't the hag's master a demon lord?"

With surprising strength, Nastra pushed him away. "Nothing can unleash the Demon Lords. They are banished forever."

Ravon grabbed her arm, this time holding on with a fierce grip. "But they *aren't*. They've already found a way to unleash themselves. They've got you,

Nastra, damn you to the Hells." He twisted her arm behind her back, and she winced in pain. "I ought to kill you. The world would thank me for it."

"Go ahead," the elf whispered. "See if that stops the forge!"

Brutally, he threw her back against the wall and stepped away, unable to execute her as she deserved. Through his contempt, he asked, "Why, Nastra? Why help the bastards?"

She slid down the wall into a crouch. In the gloaming light from the few brightglobes, she looked a bit like a hag herself. "For love."

He stared at her.

"The high lord of Cannith has my family. He'll kill them, mother, father, brothers, cousins. Merrix d'Cannith has already slain my sister." Her voice went very quiet. "Back when I first refused."

"Nice story. But you're not that important. Cannith could use any servant base enough, greedy enough, to do his bidding."

"Dragonmarked," she whispered.

"What?"

"I'm useful. My aberrant dragonmark. It shields me—just enough—from the powers of Khyber." She looked blackly up at him. "Even Stonefist can't survive down here for long. If you'd come much closer, you would understand."

He watched her carefully for signs of cunning. But oddly, he believed her. She had a gift. A twisted, awful one. And Cannith had tortured her family to be sure she used it.

"I'm sorry," he heard himself say. And he was, woefully sorry, about the hellish forge, the pact with the demons, and even Nastra's family. But pity was useless. It was anger that he needed. A righteous anger. He gazed into the smoke-laden cavern, imagining how all of Fernia would be harnessed for a new and bloody war. He felt something small and burning flicker in him, but wearily, he pushed it away.

Leaving Nastra crouched on the stairs, he climbed back to the upper realm. He hardly remembered going up the stairs, passing the hot door and, regaining the fourth level, entering his private cell.

There, on his bed, lay Finner. He was dead. Laid out, his rags smoothed, but not enough to hide the gouts of blood where he'd been struck through with a blade.

Pinned to the halfling's shirt was a note, almost illegible: *We tested sord blade witout yu. Work good!* It was signed with a bloody fist.

He knelt by Finner's side and closed the steward's bulging eyes. After a moment, his body trembling, Ravon rose to his feet. Rage filled him, flooded his mind, released his shackles. Where had he been these many months? Where had the fight gone, and the old Ravon Kell? He shook his head, as though clearing away a dream. The surge of power in his body, in his heart, told him he was ready now, to fight. All he needed was a sword.

A movement at the door. Nastra stood there. Her gaze went to Finner's body. "He didn't deserve that," she said. To his astonishment, she was holding out her ring of keys.

Ravon strode out the door, snagging the keys as he went by. His steps were long but deliberate as he stalked past the cell blocks, his mind afire. He might not be able to fight Cannith or the demons or the hag, but there was one enemy he meant to settle with, and by Dolurrh, nothing was going to stop him.

When he got to the bowel room no one was there except a couple of goblins, who backed away from him when they saw the expression on his face. Using the blue key he'd seen Nastra use, he opened the drawer where she'd locked in the sword.

Its weight was solid and lush in his hand. But he had no time to admire the forge's handiwork. He bellowed out Stonefist's name. Over the groaning of the forge's ugly heart, he heard his voice echo. The goblins crouched out of his way as he rushed into the corridor.

"Stonefist," he bellowed, "you ugly son of a sovereign bitch!"

He roared the gnoll's name again and again as he stalked down the halls with a warrior's tread, his footfalls deliberate, balanced, deadly. He knew how to enter battle. He remembered from the old days, which were not so very old, being only six months ago, back when he was Captain Ravon Kell, of his majesty's army. That Ravon Kell was back.

As he passed the twentieth cell block, a dwarf stood at the entrance. She nodded to him, pointing to the door far down the passage. Ravon understood. The forge master was on the rim. The forge master was out there throwing off slaves.

He flung open the door, letting the first light of day into the gloaming prison.

Stonefist was on the outside rim thirty yards away. Several large orcs kept him company. At the sound of the door opening, Stonefist let go of a human slave, letting him sink into a terrified puddle.

The gnoll turned to face Ravon. "Hah, Captain!" He noted that Ravon was armed. "You like sword, yes?"

"Yes."

Ravon had not moved from his place near the door.

Stonefist backed up slightly to keep his distance as the rim bore him slowly forward. "You like fight my orcs?"

"When I'm finished with you," Ravon said, "*then* I'll fight the orcs."

A slow grin crawled across the gnoll's face. Waving the orcs to stand back, he pulled a great curved blade from his belt, rumbling, "Stonefist finish *you*."

Ravon stepped from the doorway onto the inner rim as it moved in Stonefist's direction. He paced slowly backward, keeping distance from the gnoll as the two rings conspired to bring the combatants together. Between the rings was a furrow that would grind off a misplaced foot.

At the top of the forge a few artificers had emerged from the keep to look on.

Ravon hoped they would allow the fight to proceed. To fall from an artificer's bolt of power was the eighteenth way to die, and not unmanly, but not the noble end of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy like Stonefist. He stepped over the gap between the rims.

The outer rim was as broad as two gnolls lying end to end, but still there was little room to maneuver.

Ravon found his balance, feeling the sword in his hand like a magical extension of his arm. "The demon lords will teach you to lick their boots, Stonefist. Maybe you're too dumb to know that."

Stonefist grinned wolfishly. "Death hag and demon lord work for Stonefist! They open pipe to the fire. After pipe open"—he spread his arms wide—"it stay open. Nothing can close it, so artificers say. We no need hag or demon, then."

A double cross. Impressive, Ravon had to admit.

The forge master went on. "Stonefist invite hag up to rims and shove her in." Grinning, he pointed to the lethal gap. Then, raising his curved blade, he beckoned with a long arm. "Come to Stonefist."

Ravon didn't meet his opponent's eyes. In the stories, you boldly held the enemy's gaze, but in a fight you watched his chest for the first sign of movement, to gain a split second advantage.

A twinge from Stonefist betrayed a back-handed swipe, and Ravon's sword was there to greet it. He felt the shudder of the blow ring in the bones of his arm. He spun away and then around again, pricking the gnoll's upper arm.

Stonefist didn't feel it, not yet. But it riled him. "How Finner like new sword?" He lunged, missed, lunged again, as Ravon backed up.

Ravon feinted toward the gnoll's left side, then sliced his sword right. Stonefist sprang back. The gnoll was solid on his feet, and strong, but his blade was not as long as Ravon's. The forge master would die. But he was stronger than Ravon, so as much fun as the foreplay might be, it was time to finish it.

Behind Stonefist the orcs watched uneasily. They'd be the next fight, Ravon knew. He wasn't going to walk away from this battle, but he'd take a few of them with him.

Stonefist was swaying, warming up for his next lunge. "I give your eyes to the goblins for a meal!" he brayed.

Ravon shook his head. "But Stonefist, that would be vulgar."

"*Vulgaaar*!" Stonefist yelled in joy and rushed forward. Ravon jumped onto the inner rim. Then, the movement of the rim taking him past Stonefist's position, he hopped back on the outer one.

Now behind Stonefist, and before the gnoll could turn, he swung the great sword in an arcing slice at the creature's neck, knocking his head half off. It lay on his shoulder, the stump erupting with thick blood. Absurdly, Stonefist tried to put it back on, managing to tip it back into place. The forge master staggered around to stare at Ravon.

The gnoll stood as still as a rock outcropping, his gaze lit with understanding.

Ravon kicked a boot forward. "For Finner," he said, connecting hard enough to send Stonefist staggering backward. The gnoll teetered on the edge of the forge for a moment, then plummeted.

A roaring noise. The artificers sending a bolt of searing wind, no doubt. But then the roaring continued, and as Ravon became more aware of his surroundings he saw that every window, door, niche, outcropping, ramp, and hole held a slave or five, and they were all cheering. The orc guards, who had started to approach Ravon, looked up in alarm.

The real battle of the genesis forge began at that moment as dwarves, gnomes, humans, halflings, and all the rest surged onto the rings, tearing the guards apart and throwing the pieces after their master. From above, the artificers sprayed bolts into the throng, burning many, but seeing the sheer number of slaves scrambling up the sides toward them, they retreated.

The traveling rim Ravon was on had come around to the backside of the forge, and Ravon looked for a new way to enter the forge. He had another duty to discharge. Now that he was alive after all.

Inside, chaos, as the cell blocks emptied, their occupants armed with pieces of wood, old iron implements, and broken bottles. Ravon heard the roar of dwarves taking command, directing the melee, even as their meaty arms swung improvised weapons against orcs and goblins. Carnage filled the halls, but Ravon stalked through, heading for the north stairs.

The shrieks and cries of battle receded as he rushed down, fumbling with Nastra's keys, looking

for the red one, finding it. He inserted it into the hot door. Then down again, this time in silence, or in as much quiet as could exist in a manifest zone poised over the lake of fire that was Fernia.

When he arrived in the cavern, he was sweating heavily but still stoked from the combat and the churning madness of Khyber stirred his thoughts. That was good. When facing death, it was best not to be in one's right mind.

He shouted, "Death hag! By the Devourer, by the Dark Six! Death hag!"

Mists swirled around him. He bellowed again. "I bear a message for the lovely hag!"

The room stilled, as though his ears were stuffed with straw. He pivoted, looking in all directions, hating, like any warrior, not to hear his enemy, not to have every sense alert.

From behind, came a singsong voice. "Sweet meat."

He spun. The death hag leaned over him, tall and spectral.

"I bear a message." He let his sword drop to the ground. If she would only listen.

"Speak your last words," she breathed, with a breath like a month-old carcass.

"Listen until the end, hag, for your master will want to know."

"Oh, bold, bold." Her eyes rolled back and came around again. Ravon had to admire the trick.

The witch crooned, "I shall take your blood with especial pleasure. Sip, sip."

By Dolurrh, she was ugly. But he held her terrifying gaze and said, "I'm a bitter man. You may not find my flesh to your liking."

"I shall eat your tongue first, then decide."

He devoutly hoped she would kill him all at once and not save him for the occasional cannibalistic treat. He must remember to enrage her to that point. He'd always had a knack for annoying people.

Ravon hastened to say, "Here is the message from Stonefist. The baron of Cannith doesn't need you or your demon lord. Once you open the pipe, it will stay open. Cannith will ignore you. You've been duped."

The hag grabbed his shoulder, her nails strong as meat hooks. "Stonefist would not say so to such as you."

"You'd be right except I was in the process of killing him when he let it slip."

The hag screamed, smashing him down to his knees. "Where is Nastra?"

"I don't keep track of her. Sorry."

The death hag looked over his shoulder, peering into the cauldron of smoke, watchful, perhaps desperate. Turning back to him, she yanked his hair, pulling his head back to expose his neck. "Bitch, bitch, bitch!" she howled.

"Know what you mean." His head was bent so far, he thought his spine would snap. He managed to spit out, "But the elf has her good points."

The witch hunched over him, her face very near, her breath vile. "You do not fear me, manling?"

With all that was left of his voice, Ravon whispered, "Not so much."

And he didn't. He was wholly occupied with trying to figure out what number his death was going to be at the hands of the hag. Was it the three hundred and eighth way to die, or the eight hundred and third? By Dol Dorn's mighty fist, it was *important* to know.

By the time he decided both were wrong and was wildly recalculating, he found himself lying flat on the trembling ground, no one else in sight.

The death hag had gone.

Well. Perhaps his innate charm had won out.

* * *

As Ravon raced up the stairs, he felt the treads shaking beneath his feet. Splinters of stone fell from the ceiling.

The pipe. They were opening up a portal to Fernia after all. They didn't believe him. The hag didn't . . . but the shuddering continued, worsening. He barely got through the hot door as the stair collapsed behind him.

Summoning his last strength, he raced up the remaining flights. Somewhere above him the fight raged on, but even a battle could not penetrate the booming roar of what was coming.

Charging through the halls, he bellowed, "Out, out! It's coming apart. Get outside!"

The forge itself heaved from side to side. And grew hotter with every minute.

Fernia was coming up. Not in a controlled pipe, he decided. It was coming in a flood, an eruption. It would blow the forge sky high. "Out, get out!" he roared, as the slaves started to heed him. He grabbed a dead orc's pike and struck down a pair of goblins coming at him from a side hall. "Out!"

Then in a general stampede, those who yet lived raced from the corridors, cells, and crannies of the forge, heading for the door out. Bodies lay everywhere, orcs draped over dwarves and goblins over halflings, as though in a last embrace. The slaves rushed outward and Ravon followed.

Once in the clearing, he looked back to see gouts of fire erupting from the forge's window slits, and a pillar of purple smoke spiking up into the sky from the artificer's keep.

Even orcs gave up on the fight and stared. Then in a mass surge, they and everyone else turned and raced for the jungle.

Ravon noted a different group standing on one side of the dense forest. A large group of soldiers with their pack beasts also stared at the thundering, shuddering forge.

In their midst stood a lord, by his dress—a regal figure with dark hair and a chain of office around his neck. The expression on his face was one Ravon would never forget.

"Merrix d'Cannith," a voice spoke, at his side. He couldn't see anyone. But it was Nastra's voice. "He came to see the forge open. Not fall to ruin."

"Hate to see him disappointed," Ravon murmured. The ground shook violently, as one side of the forge collapsed in a deafening crash.

Nastra went on, "I can extend my cloak around you. Perhaps invisible is best under the circumstances?"

Ravon saw that a large orc was making his way toward him. "If you wouldn't mind, lady elf."

"Not that I care about you," she said. "Never think that."

The orc began to lope in his direction.

"Of course not. But we might fight our way to the coast. In case of drow. Orcs. Other riffraff. Two swords are better than one."

"Indeed," Nastra allowed.

In a swirl, the orc grew fuzzy to Ravon's eyes. The orc spun around, searching for his vanished prey. After a moment it stalked off.

Ravon felt Nastra bend an arm behind and slowly draw a sword from its sheath. She pressed its hilt into his hand.

The air split with a gargled roar. As they watched in frozen wonder, the top of the forge blew off in a gout of fire and iron. The sound engulfed the world. It was an angry blast from Fernia—but not to enliven the genesis forge, not in a controlled pipe. An eruption, sent by the minions of a demon lord to wreak death on his betrayers.

Baron d'Cannith beat a hasty retreat into the jungle as pieces of flaming iron, molten rivets, and doors red as ingots fell from the sky.

After the blast, nothing remained but a crater where the genesis forge had been. The jungle burned in places, but the eruption was done.

Ravon and Nastra turned and ran from the burning clearing. He let her lead the way, admiring her speed.

Catching up to her at last, he said, "We'll find your family. When we get to Khorvaire, we'll find them."

A quick glance at him. "Not that you care."

He shrugged. "Not in the least. But I figure I owe you."

She smiled. "A promise then."

"Call it that."

They plunged deep into the jungle of Xen'drik, watchful for orcs, drow, stray goblins, Cannith's men, and a score of other enemies. It was a world Ravon Kell remembered well. It was good to be back.

About the Author

Kay Kenyon, nominated for the Philip K. Dick and the John W. Campbell awards, began her writing career (in Duluth, Minnesota) as a copywriter for radio and TV. She kept up her interest in writing through careers in marketing and urban planning, and published her first novel, *The Seeds of Time,* in 1997. She is the author of numerous short stories, including those in *I, Alien; Live Without a Net;* and *Stars: Stories Based on the Songs of Janis Ian*. Her latest work from Pyr is a science fiction quartet with a fantasy feel: *The Entire and The Rose*. The lead title, "Bright of the Sky," was in Publishers Weekly's top 150 books of 2007. She lives in Wenatchee, Washington, with her husband. You can read a first chapter of her books at www.kaykenyon.com.

by Bill Slavicsek

Ampersand

Crisp Fall Days and Scary Autumn Nights

We're starting to get those crisp Fall days here in the Seattle area, and that means the rainy season will soon begin. But before that happens, we have clear skies. And clear skies make me think about what's over the horizon and around the next bend. For example, the R&D team is busy putting the finishing touches on Dungeons & Dragons products for the first half of 2011, and we're playtesting a number of new board games for 2012. I saw a couple of new designs today, for example, that made me very happy and which open up new play experiences for the D&D brand. It's way too early to talk about these products, but there are other things coming up in the near term that I can fill you in on.

First, let's cover some other topics before I let you in on a number of secret D&D goings-on known only to the Director of R&D and a small, select group of other people here at Wizards.

Releasing This Month

Look for the *Dungeon Master's Kit* this month, a D&D Essentials boxed set created especially for new Dungeon Masters or experienced DMs looking to add new components and adventures into their game. The boxed set features a Dungeon Master Book that contains directed information on how to best run a D&D game, two ready-to-play adventures, two double-sided poster maps, three sheets of hero and monster tokens, and a DM screen.

This month also sees the release of the next *Dungeon Tiles Master Set*. The City boxed set features 10 Dungeon Tiles sheets that let you create encounter areas with either an urban street theme or a sewer theme for when your adventures inevitably move below ground. The box itself features a grid so that you can create multilevel encounters—the street and the rooftops above, for example.

For those of you looking for something completely different, check out the D&D *Gamma World Roleplaying Game*. This box contains everything you need to create wasteland warriors searching for Omega Tech in the ruins of a radiated world. It's a wacky game of post-apocalyptic peril using the basics of the D&D game rules, so you already know how to play. It includes a deck of Alpha Mutations and Omega Tech that constantly change the game experience. If you like this dynamic element of play, look for booster packs of new cards that you can add to your game.

Finally, watch for the new R.A. Salvatore D&D novel this month. *Gauntlgrym, Book I* in the Neverwinter Trilogy, features the signature drow ranger Drizzt Do'Urden and ties into the upcoming Dungeons & Dragons *Neverwinter* cooperative computer roleplaying game. Bob is going on tour to promote the novel release and meet with fans. You can check our website to see whether the tour includes a stop near you.

Keep on the Borderlands

The new season of D&D Encounters is in full swing, but it's not too late to get in on the action! Every Wednesday night at your local game store, you can help defend the Nentir Vale and protect the Keep from monstrous threats and ravaging hordes. Use our Locator tool to find a participating D&D Encounters location near you.

D&D Youtube

Want to catch the latest D&D-related videos? Then be sure to subscribe to the D&D Channel at Youtube.

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D&D Gamma World Game Day

The next D&D Game Day is approaching fast. This time it's dedicated to all things postapocalyptic and mutanty. Bring your friends and get ready for a fast and furious romp through a radiated Earth. Become a mutant hero and square off against killer robots, weird aliens, outrageous tech, and irradiated animals. Check the store locator to find a participating retailer near you. It's the best way to see what all the excitement related to D&D *Gamma World* is all about.

Adding Fortune to Your D&D Game

Heroes always have an edge. Sometimes that edge comes from deep within, and sometimes it shows up in the form of luck, divine intervention, or the whim of some other supernatural and unfathomable force. Early next year, Dungeons & Dragons *Fortune Cards: Aspects of Fate* debuts to add this optional element to any D&D campaign. Sold in booster packs, *D&D Fortune Cards* provide minor boosts that help propel the story of every encounter in different and exciting ways. This new element makes a perfect addition to any home campaign, and will also feature prominently in D&D Encounters and other D&D Organized Play programs. I'll talk more about *D&D Fortune Cards* next month and show off a few of the cards as well.

Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms Preview

Next month, the second player-focused D&D Essentials product hits the shelves. *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms* features new builds for the Druid, Paladin, Ranger, and Warlock. It also includes the dragonborn, drow, half-elf, half-orc, human, and tiefling races. Here's a preview of one of the two Ranger builds in the book, a Martial controller called the Hunter. This is only a preview. Check out the actual product for the complete class entry.

Ranger

Martial and Primal Controller: Rangers such as the hunter use their training and skill with ranged weapons as well as a reverence for the natural world to make them champions of the wilderness.

Martial and Primal Striker: Rangers such as the scout mix a singular two-weapon combat style with a mastery of primal magic to overwhelm their foes.

Why This Is the Class for You: You want to play an adventurer who combines wilderness prowess with primal magic.

Some heroes are more at home among the trees or in open fields than they are when walking the streets of a city. In ages past, rangers kept the peace along the farthest frontiers of civilization, wandering the land to root out monsters and keep the roads clear of threats. Today, the empires of old are long gone, their roads fallen into ruin. Yet even as the encroaching darkness grows ever bolder, rangers continue the valiant fight to keep the borderlands safe and secure. So well do they perform this task that many of those on the frontier never realize the debt they owe to those who protect them.

Many common folk are suspicious of rangers, knowing their kind only as loners who have no ties to kin or community. Indeed, some rangers eventually become little more than hermits watching over specific areas of the wild. However, as the darkness encroaches upon civilization, many rangers take on a protective role that prompts them to wander throughout all settled lands. A ranger's abilities reflect the divide between civilization and wilderness. Although rangers learn to master weapons, most commonly bows and those used in two-weapon fighting, they augment this martial training with their knowledge of primal magic. A ranger in the wild counts on his or her woodcraft and mastery of magic to survive.

The types of ranger you can create with this book are the hunter and the scout.

Hunter

Key Abilities: Dexterity, Wisdom

Hunters are the masters of ranged weapons, and they draw on cunning battle tactics to deter their enemies. Reverent allies of the natural world, hunters train in the deep forests and wilderness, tracking down and slaying monsters intent on attacking villages and towns. At the same time, they seek to find harmony with the beneficial creatures of nature, and they learn to dabble in primal power—the magic of nature itself.

A hunter is a controller first and foremost, manipulating the battlefield using high-precision ranged attacks. Against single targets, however, a hunter's attacks pack a punch that make it lean toward striker as a secondary role.

Class Traits

Hit Points: You start with hit points equal to 12 + your Constitution score. You gain 5 hit points each time you gain a level.

Bonus to Defenses: +1 Fortitude, +1 Reflex

Healing Surges per Day: 6 + your Constitution modifier

Armor Proficiencies: Cloth, leather

Weapon Proficiencies: Simple melee, military melee, simple ranged, military ranged

Class Skills: Acrobatics (Dex), Athletics (Str), Dungeoneering (Wis), Endurance (Con), Heal (Wis), Nature (Wis), Perception (Wis), Stealth (Dex)

Trained Skills: Dungeoneering or Nature, plus four more from the list of class skills

HUNTER HEROIC TIER

Total XP	Level	Feats Known	Class Features and Powers
0	1	1	Archery Style Expert Archer Disruptive shot Weapon Talent Aspects of the wild Wilderness knacks
1,000	2	+1	Utility power
2,250	3	–	Improved Disruptive Shot
3,750	4	+1	Ability score increase Wilderness knack
5,500	5	–	Reactive shift Weapon Mastery
7,500	6	+1	Utility power
10,000	7	–	Aspect of the wild Improved Disruptive Shot
13,000	8	+1	Ability score increase Wilderness knack
16,500	9	–	Close Combat Archery
20,500	10	+1	Utility power

Heroic Hunter

In the heroic tier, you master both the mysteries of primal magic and the intricacies of the bow. With your aspects, you learn to combine the two into a deadly fighting style.

Level 1: Archery Style

All hunters are archers, and your choice of ranged weapon defines an archery style that you will hone and perfect over the course of your adventuring career. Many hunters—from the elves and eladrin of the wild forests to the humans and half-orcs of the plains and tundra—choose the longbow as their signature weapon. Most halflings prefer the shortbow due to its ease of use by smaller combatants, but either weapon excels at mowing down groups of marauding goblins, orcs, and other foul creatures.

The crossbow is often a more useful weapon in the cramped quarters of the Underdark. The dwarf hunters who took up their profession in the ancient caverns of their race's fallen strongholds favor the crossbow, as do hunters who spend their time in the gloom-tainted forest ruins spread across the borderlands. You gain one of the following features depending on your choice of ranged weapon.

Bow Hunter

You have spent so many hours training with the bow that you have learned, on your own, to use the weapon as capably as someone who received special training.

Benefit: You gain the Bow Expertise feat.

Crossbow Hunter

As an expert with the crossbow, you can reload bolts in the blink of an eye. You have also mastered the intricacies of this weapon, attaining a high level of skill through focused training and practice.

Benefit: You gain the Crossbow Expertise feat.

Also, if a crossbow you wield has the load minor property, you can instead reload it as a free action.

Level 1: Expert Archer

In the hands of a hunter, a ranged weapon becomes the most fearsome tool on the battlefield. Each arrow or bolt you fire is part of a deadly assault that no foe can stand against for long. You learn a number of tricks and techniques with ranged weapons.

Benefit: You gain the following three powers.

Aimed Shot

Your focus and training allow you to draw a bead on your target despite cover, fog, and other impediments. Your mind clears, your foe comes into focus, and you unleash a shot.

Aimed Shot — Ranger Attack

Your mastery of the bow allows you to disregard cover, concealment, or some other hindrance.

At-Will ✦ Martial
Standard Action **Personal**

Effect: You make a ranged basic attack with a weapon, ignoring the penalty to attack rolls imposed by partial cover and partial concealment. In addition, the penalty to attack rolls imposed by superior cover and total concealment is no worse than –2 for this attack.

Clever Shot

Your skill with ranged attacks comes across in a variety of ways. *Aimed shot* reflects your focus and accuracy, while *rapid shot* is the byproduct of your speed and skill in handling your weapon. *Clever shot* draws on your guile and insight. You aim your shot to strike your foe at just the right angle, hindering its movement or knocking it backward as you see fit.

Clever Shot — Ranger Attack

By carefully judging your target's stance, you unleash a shot that sends the enemy tumbling.

At-Will ✦ Martial
Standard Action Personal

Effect: You make a ranged basic attack with a weapon. If the attack hits, the target is also subject to one of the following effects of your choice:

✦ You slide the target up to 2 squares.
✦ The target falls prone.
✦ The target is slowed (save ends).

Rapid Shot

By sacrificing some amount of accuracy, you unleash a series of attacks against your enemies that encourage them to spread out. When your enemies linger close to each other, your speed and confidence with your weapon allow you to lay waste their formations.

Rapid Shot — Ranger Attack

You take careful aim at a group of enemies before unleashing a succession of arrows.

At-Will ✦ Martial
Standard Action Personal

Effect: You make a ranged basic attack with a weapon against each creature in or adjacent to a square within the attack's range. You take a –2 penalty to the attack rolls.

Level 1: Aspects of the Wild

You have spent uncounted days in the wild, seeking forgotten paths, hunting bandits and monsters that threaten the scattered points of civilization along the frontier, and ferreting out nascent threats before they grow to menace the land. Your hours of isolated wandering build on the lore of the master hunters who taught you what you know, granting you insight into the mysterious workings of primal magic. By channeling this power, you take on the grace and strength of great beasts of the wild as you hunt your foes.

Each aspect grants a particular benefit to your attacks, whether by helping you better control the battlefield through forcing your enemies to move, limiting a creature's combat options, or dealing damage to additional foes.

Benefit: You gain two of the following powers of your choice.

Aspect of the Cunning Fox

A ranger trains to fight, but sometimes the best tactic is one that allows you to escape from a battle. Like a fox, you use speed and cunning to outwit your foes. They might attempt to hinder your movement, but you easily dodge their attacks. When you strike, you remain one step ahead of your foes, dancing in and out of the battle.

Aspect of the Cunning Fox Ranger Utility

Like a fox, you move with stealth, speed, and cunning. Your foes cannot hope to harm you while you are in motion, and you always keep an open escape route at hand.

At-Will ✦ Primal, Stance
Minor Action Personal
Effect: You assume a stance, the aspect of the cunning fox. Until the stance ends, you gain the following benefits.
✦ You take only half damage from attacks made against you during your turn.
✦ Whenever you hit or miss with a melee attack or a ranged attack on your turn, you can take a free action to shift up to 2 squares.

Aspect of the Dancing Serpent

A serpent strikes like lightning and retreats like a ghost. It lands deadly attacks but never lingers near its enemy. You mimic these tactics with this aspect, pouncing upon an isolated enemy and not letting it bog you down in close quarters.

Aspect of the Dancing Serpent Ranger Utility

You move like a snake, darting here and there, never remaining within reach of your foe.

At-Will ✦ Primal, Stance
Minor Action Personal
Effect: You assume a stance, the aspect of the dancing serpent. Until the stance ends, you gain the following benefits.
✦ You can take a free action at the end of each of your turns to shift 1 square.
✦ When you make a basic attack against an enemy that has none of its allies adjacent to it, you gain a +1 power bonus to the attack roll and damage roll.
Level 11: The bonus to the damage roll increases to +2.
Level 21: The bonus to the damage roll increases to +3.

Level 1: Wilderness Knacks

All rangers learn to survive in the wilderness, whether that realm is a frozen tundra, a verdant forest, or a mushroom-choked cavern deep beneath the earth. You have acquired a couple of tricks and abilities that give you and your allies a key edge.

Benefit: You gain two of the following abilities of your choice.

Ambush Expertise

You have wandered through dangerous realms, such as kingdoms ruled by hobgoblin tyrants and mountain ranges jealously guarded by brooding giants. You know not only how to hide yourself, but also how to hide others.

Benefit: Whenever you make a Stealth check, each ally within 10 squares of you gains a +2 bonus to his or her next Stealth check before the end of your next turn.

Next time, more news, more R&D secrets, and more previews from the Director's desk. Until then, play a game or two of Dungeons & Dragons Castle Ravenloft board game as the month draws to a close and the things that go bump in the night make themselves heard. You'll have a great time.

Keep playing,
Bill

Gamma World, Part 1

BY RICHARD BAKER AND BRUCE CORDELL

It's a hundred years from now, and the world's gone mad. Our civilization lies in radioactive ruins. Monstrous mutated animals and things dislocated out of time, dimension, and space roam the land. Neo-savage mutant adventurers delve into the ruins in search of priceless technology—weapons and machines left over from our own 21st century, as well as fantastically advanced technology introduced into the world in the instant of the Big Mistake. Welcome to Gamma World!

Rich Baker and Bruce Cordell, designers for the new Dungeons & Dragons *Gamma World Role-playing Game*, take a few minutes to show you what goes on when we resurrect a classic game world from the radioactive ashes.

What's the Game About?

Rich: Gamma World is a game where you play mutant heroes armed with a mix of primitive and futuristic tech, taking on the dangers of a radioactive, ruined Earth. Basically, it takes the tropes of classic fantasy roleplaying and recasts them for a postapocalyptic future. Instead of fighters, clerics, or wizards, you're playing mutants whose random mutations might give them abilities from pyrokinesis to duplication to enormous size. You don't explore monster-filled dungeons, you explore ancient ruins and installations roamed by vicious mutated beasts and robots run amok. Instead of magical items or holy relics, you find modern firearms or examples of sci-fi weaponry like powered armor or fusion rifles. It's a dangerous world, and you're the heroes who are dedicated to protecting what's left from hordes of savage marauders and rampaging mutant monsters.

Gamma World is light, fast, deadly, and not too serious. You can roll up your characters and get to blasting mutants in 30 minutes or less; if a character is disintegrated by a trek bomb or torn to pieces by mobile flesh-eating mutant cactuses, you get to roll up a new one. You might battle an ancient war machine, or you might battle 6-foot-tall intelligent mutant rabbits with M-16s and dreams of conquest. Bring a sense of humor to the game. And a fusion rifle.

Bruce: This game rocks some serious pro-mutant attitude, plus a hefty helping of super-science for all you nerds who'd feel right at home in the 24th century. And *Gamma World* offers just the right environment for the gratuitous mix of both. When multiple parallel dimensions come crashing down on each other to form a single unstable consensus reality, the survivors must learn a whole new set of rules to live by in the aftermath.

ALPHA
PSI
MACHINE COMMAND
You telepathically seize control of a robot, computer, or similar device.
STANDARD ACTION RANGED 10
TARGET: One android, robot, computer, or vehicle
ATTACK: Level + 3 vs. Will
HIT: You dominate the target (save ends).
Aftereffect: The target is dazed (save ends).
SPECIAL: You can cause a target that does not normally take actions, such as a vehicle or excavator, to operate as you direct—for example, you could order a robot excavator to dig a trench.
OVERCHARGE: When you use this power, you can roll a d20.
10+: The target takes a –5 penalty to saving throws against this power.
9 OR LESS: The target gains a +5 bonus to attack rolls against you while this card is readied.

ALPHA
BIO
SENSITIVE NOSE
"Dude! You ever hear of deodorant?"
BENEFIT: You develop a strong sense of smell. You gain a +10 power bonus to Perception checks and ignore the –2 penalty for attacking an enemy that has concealment.
OVERCHARGE: When you start your turn, you can roll a d20.
10+: While this card is readied, you replace each of your Perception check rolls with a 20 and gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls.
9 OR LESS: All you can smell is three-month-old gym socks (save ends). While under this effect, you are dazed.

OMEGA
VIBRO SWORD
Just think "chainsaw on steroids."
WEAPON: 1-hand melee
POWER: Encounter ✧ Physical
STANDARD ACTION MELEE 1
TARGET: One or two creatures
ATTACK: Level + 8 vs. AC
HIT: 3d8 + Strength modifier + your level physical damage, and ongoing 5 physical damage (save ends).
SALVAGE 3: A 3rd-level character can salvage the vibro sword. It becomes a heavy 1-hand melee weapon: Str/Con; +2 accuracy; 1d8 damage, and ongoing 5 physical damage (save ends).

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WHERE ARE THE MUTANTS OF YESTERYEAR?

Gamma World is one of the oldest RPG settings around. The game's first edition, by James M. Ward and Gary Jaquet, was published by TSR, Inc. in 1978—and it grew out of an even earlier game, *Metamorphosis Alpha*, which was published in 1976. Updated editions appeared in 1983, 1985, and 1992. In fact, the mechanic of Armor Class scaling *up*—one of the notable improvements incorporated in D&D 3rd Edition—originated in Gamma World Fourth Edition, designed by Bruce Nesmith. No more AC -3, thank you very much! Gamma World also appeared as a supplement for the Alternity Science Fiction Roleplaying Game in 2000. Noted game designer Jonathan Tweet updated the setting once again with Omega World, a d20 system mini-game for Dungeon magazine published in 2002. This year's model marks Gamma World's first appearance in almost ten years. We hope you like it!

A lucky (or sometimes, unlucky) few have just the right genetic or algorithmic predisposition to spontaneously manifest entirely new mutant abilities by drawing upon the fluxing world lines. Sure, at heart you may be a cybernetic yeti escaped from some research facility. On some days, however, you can command machines at your whim, while on others, your fluctuating mutant acumen provides you with a cranked-up sniffer.

Either way, whether your mutation is flashy or slightly dorky, no one's going to look down on you when you show them the latest piece of super-science you plucked from the ruins of all tomorrow's hopes: A chainsaw on steroids called a vibro sword!

The Big Mistake?

Bruce: Most people believe the world was once perfect, but then the Big Mistake wiped it out, leaving behind the blasted landscape and visibly cracked moon of Gamma Terra. Residents of that utopian former world (you and me) are called Ancients, and their ruins and still-functioning super-science artifacts can still be found.

Insofar as it can be determined by people of Gamma Terra, the Big Mistake was a combination of events kicked off by an accident at an Ancient installation called the Large Hadron Collider that was attempting to locate the "God Particle." Depending on the story, it was one of those tiny things that didn't seem important at the time: a bird dropped a piece of bread, which precipitated a series of cascading malfunctions culminating in the event that partially collapsed billions of parallel timelines into a single worldtrack! Uncomprehending nations in a large percentage of these parallel Earths mistook the collapse for an attack by enemies and immediately launched their arsenals of nuclear, chemical, biological, and superscience weapons at each other.

That was some years ago. Since then, remnant poisons, fluxing timelines, and transposed creatures and technology of myriad alternate dimensions combined to create a unique tableau that any Ancient would deride as the gibberings of a down-on-her-luck pulp novelist. From where you're sitting, it's obviously no fantasy, but sometimes it sure seems crazy.

Rich: One of the grand traditions of Gamma World design is that you get to re-imagine the Cataclysm each time you do a new edition of the game. It's a game designer rite of passage, really. For a couple of years now we've seen the occasional article pointing out that some folks have concern about what will happen when this big particle accelerator or that gravity wave detector is turned on, including the very remote chance that a black hole will consume Earth. (I suppose I can understand that people would want to be very certain that wouldn't happen.) Bruce and I kicked it around, and we decided that a gang of well-meaning scientists who make a Big Mistake was a fine new spin on the world-ending apocalypse.

However, there's actually a good reason to play around with Gamma World's origin story beyond pure designers' vanity. The best examples of the postapocalyptic genre—say, *Road Warrior*, *Fallout*, or *The Postman* (just kidding)—don't involve the destruction of a world advanced several centuries from the current day. They blow up the world that we live in right now. The genre is more visceral, more riveting, when the ruins are places you know and the gear consists of things you can get your hands on now. We wanted a setting that could accommodate a Road Warrior-style game but still sprinkle in fantastic SF tech like fusion rifles and vibroblades. That's why we went with a world origin that drops elements of super-tech into the skeleton of the Earth you know.

Mutant Heroes

Rich: Rolling up Gamma World characters is insanely fun. Bruce and I started our design work on character generation by looking over the long tables of random mutations from previous editions of

Gamma World. Rather than trying to provide a single grand table with a hundred entries, we decided to group mutation packages into character components we called themes or origins. So, if you got the seismic package, you got rocky skin and a foot stomp/earthquake power. The real fun is that you begin play with *two* origins, randomly determined, and they might not go together at all—for example, seismic hawkoid. (Business manager Kieran Chase rolled up that one in a playtest.) So, what are you? Some kind of hawk made from rocks? Somebody like the Fantastic Four's Thing, except with feathery wings? How does that manage to fly? We were all stumped for a minute or two, but then we figured it out: Kieran's character was a *gargoyle*. Hey, that's kinda cool!

(Of course, you aren't forced to roll your character's two origins randomly. You can pick off the chart if you really want to. But we think that's for wimps. Real survivors roll for their mutations!)

At one point, we had another step in character creation where you picked your character role and laid it as a template over your two origins. For example, if you wanted to be a leader, you got X and Y for hit points and surges, and you got the *healing word* power. The idea worked OK, but it turned out to be an unnecessary step in character creation. We decided that your origins could carry the weight of suiting your character for one role or another. If you have skin made of rock, you're naturally going to be a good choice to be the party's tank. If you can shoot laser beams from your eyes, you're a pretty good ranged striker. Given the fact that powerful high-tech firearms give just about every character the potential to stand back and blast away for respectable damage, we decided that we could live with less emphasis on starkly defined character roles and party composition.

Bruce: The mutant fun doesn't stop with your origin. Sure, you may be a gargoyle, an Ancient store mannequin that's acquired the power of speech, or a swarm of radioactive cockroaches with a hive mind, and that's a fantastic start. But what about acquiring completely new mutations during the course of play, in the spirit of the original game?

Short answer: yes you can. What to most folks of Gamma Terra is a poisonous mix of mutagens, radiation, and time-space fractures is for you (as a player character) a catalyst that grants access to exciting new mutant abilities every day. These changeable mutations are mediated by the Alpha mutation cards. Alpha cards represent randomly shuffled possibilities that flux into and out of play. You may go into one encounter with, let's admit it, socially awkward mandibles protruding from your face. But if the worldliness and background radiation levels flux just right, those could melt away and leave you with the ability to control gravity itself! Then it's payback time for everyone who made fun of your mandibles.

ALPHA
DARK, PHYSICAL, ZONE
CRUSHING GRAVITY
"Let's make mutant pancakes!"
STANDARD ACTION AREA BURST 3 WITHIN 10
EFFECT: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Whenever a creature starts its turn within the zone, it is slowed until the start of its next turn and you make the following attack against it.
ATTACK: Level + Constitution vs. Fortitude
HIT: 2d6 + Constitution modifier + your level physical damage, and you knock the target prone.
OVERCHARGE: When you use this power, you can roll a d20.
10+: On a hit, the target is also immobilized (save ends).
9 OR LESS: You are also immobilized (save ends). You can't save against this effect during the turn you overcharge it.

Parking Meters, AK-47s, and Powered Armor

Rich: The classic illustrations of Gamma World characters feature a mishmash of barbarism and super high-tech. You might be walking around with a stop sign for a shield or carrying a parking meter for a club (do you have any idea how heavy those things are, by the way?), you might have a .44-magnum revolver stuck in your waistband, or you might wear powered assault armor and carry a medieval mace for when your plasma gun runs out of juice. In the iconic Gamma World campaign, heroes should begin at 1st level with stone age or medieval tech and slowly progress up through modern firearms to early-SF tech to super-SF tech as they continue their adventures.

When we started working on Gamma World gear, we hit a tricky spot with modern firearms. I just couldn't bring myself to say that your M-16 is really about as good as a crossbow or thrown spear, because it seems to me there's a good reason modern soldiers carry rifles instead of bows. So how could we make firearms clearly better without making them the only choice a player would consider? The answer we struck on was the idea of an Ammo weapon quality. Basically, if a weapon has the Ammo quality, you normally use it only once per encounter. You're assumed to be husbanding your shots, saving those precious cartridges for really important attacks. However, if you decide you just don't care, you can go ahead and use that weapon for as many attacks as you want during the encounter ... but at the end of the fight you're Out of Ammo, and you can't use that weapon again until you get your hands on more. Maybe you'll find some while poking around in the ruins, maybe you'll take some off your dead enemies, or maybe you'll be able

to barter for a few more cartridges when you reach the next town. It's not entirely in your hands as a player, so running out of ammo might be a real hardship.

One of the nice side effects of the ammo rule is that we're never going to make you track exactly how many shots you have left. It's a little more cinematic than that. You either have ammo, or you don't. And it's no fair buying six different pistols and shooting each of them once per battle: all of your ammo is a common pool. Since firearms have this special drawback of one shot per encounter, we bumped up their accuracy and damage over medieval-era ranged weapons. If you're someplace where ammo is plentiful, you'll happily shoot every round. Otherwise, a bow might be a safer choice. It's easier to make arrows than it is to find cartridges, after all.

Bruce: Sometimes you find a battered but usable M-16 in the salvage-or-die ruinlands of Gamma Terra. Other times, you find Omega tech in the form of a fusion rifle, or maybe powered armor with onboard weapons! Oh happy day, right?

Of course. But just as Rich described how modern-day firearms should be better than bows, we needed superscience weapons to be better than modern-day fire arms. Our solution was somewhat similar to the 'husbanding your ammo' rule, in that you can only fire or use your Omega tech item once per encounter, and each use of that item runs the risk of running down the item's charge permanently. This was a great solution for play on a couple of different fronts, not only because it helped cap overuse of really powerful technology but because it also increases the variety of Omega tech items that come into play over the course of a game, and in Gamma World, variety equals fun.

On the other hand, this 'use until discharged' rule on its own doesn't provide players with a chance to build up their character identity. For instance, if you see yourself as the cybernetic yeti who's a master at the vibro sword, you're going to feel a little foolish when you use up the final charge and your vibro sword becomes an inert piece of jagged metal with a hilt.

Enter the Salvage rules! When your character finds a piece of Omega tech he or she develops a particular attachment to, there's a good chance that item can be rigged to work permanently. It may not work as well as the original version, but it still works damned well, and you get to cling to that character image where you're a vibro sword master.

Monsters of Terra Gamma

Rich: Gamma World just wouldn't be Gamma World without badders, hoops, obbs, and sleeths. We picked thirty of our favorites for the Gamma World Roleplaying Game box and created brand-new 4e-style versions of them, including color art for each critter. Previous editions of Gamma World had the unfortunate habit of hiding *extremely important information* about monsters in very innocuous "Mutation" entries following the basic stats. For example, you might remember that the arks are the dog-people who wear leather armor and carry spiked clubs... but I'll bet you don't remember that they had powers of life leech, telekinesis, and weather control! If you got into a tussle with a pack of arks, the GM had to remember to go look up those mutations and use them, which makes for a very different encounter than you might expect from the basic description of the monster. This time around, we can describe crazy mutations like those as monster powers and make sure they're right where the GM can find them.

One of the big changes in this time Gamma World is that it's fully compatible with the Dungeons & Dragons game. You can take monsters straight out of the D&D *Monster Manual* and throw them at your Gamma World heroes with no conversion needed. Everybody has the same ability scores, same defenses, and same action economy. This means that a Gamma World GM has thousands of D&D monsters in print to expand the game's monster selection. And, let's face it, there are some D&D monsters that work just fine as inexplicably bizarre mutants you might run into if you poke around on Gamma Terra long enough.

Bruce: Some of my favorite new monsters are actually revised versions of monsters I used in my own high school Gamma World games, such as the gamma moth. What the high-school version of myself failed to appreciate was just how terribly lethal those old gamma moths were. After a 2-hour character roll-up session, I sent my players into an encounter with gamma moths infesting the very first chamber of a pre-catastrophe ruin. I thought I was providing everyone an opportunity to gain new mutations, but thanks to a high roll on the attack dice, what I ended up providing was a highly radioactive mass grave. Oops!

But despite (because of?) that, I have a soft spot in my heart for gamma moths. Yes, they're still radioactive bastards that you should watch out for. But now when you send your group of level-appropriate adventurers into an encounter that includes them, you shouldn't discover you've unintentionally created a perfect place to end your campaign.

NEXT MONTH: Rich and Steve Schubert (lead developer) talk about the Gamma World Booster Cards!

Last of the Mojitas

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE

illustrations by William O'Conner, Jared von Hindman, and Mike Faille

"Congratulations," Greg said about thirty minutes into our game. "You've managed to cover just about every perceived female psychosis."

To be clear, *I* wasn't experiencing those psychoses. My newest *Gamma World* character was. Yes, *Gamma World*. (I told you. I'm addicted.) But don't worry: Neither this game, nor the several I played before it, is taking a turn for the serious. It's *Gamma World*, remember? I expect it to fly off the rails here pretty soon, just like any good *Gamma World* game should.

After that first session with the *Wyld Stallyns* that had me obsessively creating new *Gamma World* characters, I was invited to join Greg Bilsland's game. OK, *invited* maybe too strong a word.

"You want to crash our game?" Greg asked when I cornered him in a stairwell.

"Just for a couple of weeks," I promised. "Until I find my own game."

"I guess it's okay," he said, staring at the suitably mutant-looking miniatures I cradled in my arms. "I mean you already have a character. Or... twelve?"

"Sixteen, but I'd like to create another one for this game," I said.

That Friday, the rest of the group, which included Trevor Kidd, Josh Dillard, and Chuck Arnett, ate their Jersey Mike's subs while Greg indulged me. Even watching someone else roll up a character can be entertaining.

Welcome to the world, Mojita Especiala, a lime green gelatinous cockroach. She's not so much *cockroach* as she is *gelatinous*. Her blobby being was forced into a roach-shaped bundt cake pan which doubles as armor. It's like squeezing into a pair of skinny jeans after a long workout.

"Very painful," I explained. Not to mention humiliating should someone be in the locker room with you.

"Bundt pan armor." Greg wrote it down. "Got it."

I hope they like Mojita. She can't wait to meet them.

Her soon-to-be adventuring party consisted of an engineered human named Victor XVIII (who takes his surname from the engraving on his grandfather's tank), a barbarian chieftain ghost named Lorthog, Son of Thangdar who can only animate the body of a child-size mannequin in order to interact with living creatures, and Ragnarok, a Mythic Entropic.

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"A what?" I asked.

"From *Famine in Far-Go*," Chuck said with pride. "He's from the future."

Fear of Roleplaying

At this point, the rest of the group hadn't yet met Mojita. They first stumbled into what they presumed to be a NORAD ancillary facility in the Color Radio Mountains.

"Color Radio?" I asked.

"Yep," Greg said, pinning a map of Colorado to the white board.

They spent much of their previous time looting the ruins in search of weapons used by the "Ancients." A bonus find was a broken-down Apache helicopter.

"Viktor can get this working again," Trevor said. "Viktor can do anything."

Except figure out how to work a proper pronoun into a sentence, I thought to myself. What does he think this is? Facebook?

Viktor's two lackeys took off in search of anything that could help with the helicopter.

"I'm on it, boss!" Lorthog said, taking off.

"Me too!" Ragnarok yelled in pursuit.

Josh and Chuck are really nice guys. They're always willing to help me judge contests or haul 1,500 shrink-wrapped posters to my car. Once Chuck even helped me weigh the pros and cons of cognac leather verses mahogany suede when I found myself in a winter boot conundrum. (His arguments for both were so well articulated, I ended up buying both pairs.) But I can't imagine either of them as the kinds of guys to call their co-workers "boss." Especially when they're not.

Trevor slapped his palm on the table, knocking over my d20 tower. "Hurry! We don't have all day!"

"I'm looking as fast as I can, boss," Chuck answered.

Wow, I thought. For someone who wants his buddies to speed it up, Trevor wasn't exactly stepping on it himself. We didn't have all day, but Greg did have the room booked for four hours. What's his deal?

Oh no, I thought. I knew exactly what his deal was. He's too nice a guy to say it to my face. *I'm* what's going on. Me barging in on their regular game was cramping his style. I was messing up their juju. Time to ingratiate myself.

"Want some Twizzlers, Trevor?" I asked. "Sun Chips? What about a King Size Kit Kat? I have two in my gym bag."

"I'm good!" he chirped, brightening right away. Maybe just the thought of a Kit Kat was enough to lighten his mood.

Josh and Chuck brought back potential motor parts to Viktor like they were offering rosemary and wine to a hearth and home god. Or Twizzlers and Sun Chips to a disgruntled player.

Not impressed, Trevor waved them away. "Keep looking, peons." He pulled out his iPhone. Weird. My iPhone barely survived a week in the Australian outback let alone the apocalypse. But still, Trevor wasn't acting Trevor-ish. First the sighs, then answering to "boss," then rejecting my king-sized Kit Kat. He's the epitome of gamer, so I doubted he was bored. Maybe it was a side effect of all this radiation?

Then it hit me. The *talking*. And not just the "What are you having for dinner tonight" or "Would you rather have eyes in the back of your head or a giant lizard tail" table talking I'm used to. This was *relevant* talking. Like *important to the game* talking. This was—gasp!—*roleplaying*!

I know what you're thinking: "This is D&D, you big dummy!" But maybe you don't remember my irrational fear of roleplaying and playing D&D with people who are:

1. Too serious.
2. Jerks.
3. Really good at roleplaying.

This is why I usually create characters that are sullen or naïve or too apathetic to talk to strangers. It's also why I ended up taking Driver and Traffic Safety in college instead of Intro to Improv! Exactly why I

could only move my mouth like a trout out of water when I stood in line to get my tattered copy of *The World According to Garp* signed by John Irving.

What if I make a fool of myself?

Now, these guys were not serious or jerks, but they did appear to be good at roleplaying. And I'm the new girl here. I've got to join them or beat it. I looked down at my freshly rolled up character sheet and thought of poor Mojita.

Oh please, can I stay? She begged. *I won't make a fool of myself!*

She's right. I can do this. I was a theater major! I love public speaking! My cat and dog have voices and at least six conversations a day! (OK, on that note, what *is* wrong with me?) What's so hard about a little roleplaying?

But it was too late. Panic moved in and tossed reason's possessions to the curb. The guys were chattering back and forth, *in character*, with Greg interjecting important plot developments or story elements or Alpha Mutation cards now and again. It was only a matter of time before they discovered the new girl! Was it too late to remember an appointment with my therapist? Was it too late to make one?

Meeting Mojita

"Ragnarok is going to look down this hallway," Chuck said, smiling at me.

No! They're going to discover Mojita soon! Wait. Isn't that the point? What am I going to say?

Greg spoke up. "You find what appears to be a laboratory at the end of the hall."

A laboratory! I bet Mojita is there!

"Ragnarok bum rushes the door to open it."

"Give me an Athletics check."

Fail it!

"Twenty-three."

Oh no!

"You smash through the door," Greg said, "rather dramatically I might add, and notice something scampering in the shadows."

"Guys!" Ragnarok yelled. "There's something in here!"

I hoped it was something a lot more interesting than a green, cake-pan-wearing cockroach. The other two guys gathered around Ragnarok among the shards and splinters from the door he knocked down.

"You might want to try the doorknob next time," Viktor said.

After a successful Perception check, Lorthog noticed what Greg described as "a glob of green Jell-O seeping from behind a large, busted up, walk-in refrigerator." They sent Ragnarok to investigate.

The guys looked at me.

"Well?" they asked.

"Well?" I asked Greg. "Am I that green blob?"

"Do you see any other green blobs here?" Greg responded.

"Hello?" Ragnarok asked.

Remember that episode of *The Brady Bunch* where Cindy was on that televised quiz show and totally froze up when she saw the red "On-Air" light go on?

"Baton Rouge!" urged Marcia from the Brady family room. "She knows this one!"

I knew Baton Rouge, too, but at this moment around the conference room table, the fluorescent lights might as well have been bright, red bulbs and the answer to hello might as well have been Baton Rouge. I caved to my basic instinct.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Are you crying?" Greg asked.

And ... scene!

OK, back up. *I* wasn't crying. But Mojita was. *Way to go*, Instinct.

"Why are you sad, little green blob thing?" Ragnarok asked. His sweetness almost made me cry for real.

"Don't come near me!" I shouted. Again, I have awesome instincts.

"Hush, little cockroach," Lorthag cooed. "You're okay now."

"How do you know she's okay," Viktor asked. "She's a semi-preserved blob of bug oozing out of a cake pan. Restrain her!"

"Hands off!" I shouted.

"Sorry!" said Ragnarok.

"I need a hug," Mojita sobbed.

Honestly, I wasn't sure what was up with Mojita other than she obviously didn't want to be a cockroach. Or gelatinous. Or committed to one emotion. I just watched a documentary about the toils and troubles of teenage girls and am still emotionally scarred from it. (I also have an irrational fear of teenagers. Especially emotionally damaged ones. No one mutates like a teenaged girl.)

"She's clearly traumatized!" I said, then remembered I'm supposed to be in character. "I mean, *I'm* clearly traumatized. Don't look at me! I'm a monster!"

Ragnarok moved backward and covered his eyes. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to stare."

"Wait!" I yelled. "Don't go!"

Viktor moved closer to investigate. "Who sent you? What's your story, Jelly Belly?"

Hmm. Good question. I guess I should have assumed I'd need one.

"No one *sent* me!" Mojita sobbed. "Can't you see I'm a victim here? The Ancients' half-assed experiment backfired and left me as a semi-solidified green globule wedged into a cake pan! Who knows what they were planning to do with me?" There. That worked.

"I hope they used *Pam*," Chuck said.

"No kidding," I agreed, thinking of that beautiful, praline crumble that got scalped from a pumpkin cheesecake because I forgot to grease the springform pan.

Chuck shook his head. "Rookie mistake. You should know better."

"Ahem," Viktor interrupted, bringing us back to the post-apocalypse. "What do you know about helicopters?"

Here's the strange thing (and yeah, I know, that's a pretty high bar when you're playing *Gamma World*.) *I* know nothing about helicopters. But Mojita has the Mechanics skill. So I made up some stuff about helicopters. Conversations were had. Decisions were made. The game moved forward. No one laughed inappropriately. Soon Mojita was inching along behind the group, making moony eyes at Viktor because not only does she have severe body and self-esteem issues but also suffers from an off-shoot of Stockholm Syndrome.

Viktor may have been a bit full of himself but apparently some of that was deserving. He managed to get the helicopter working and even claimed to know how to operate its humongous rocket launcher.

"Oooh, Mojita is impressed!" I said. "Can you put on this fireman's hat and do that again?"

Viktor declined, but I had a feeling Trevor would be all over that.

What's a Poong, and How Do I Kill One?

Once airborne, Viktor headed toward the "real" NORAD facility using the coordinates found in a previous game. All was going swimmingly until Greg dropped some Poong on us.

"I'm sorry," I interrupted. "Some what?"

"Poongs," Greg repeated. "Glow dragons?"

Right. Of course.

Whatever they are, they dropped from outer space and landed on the helicopter's skids. Their bright green orbs morphed into flying worms.

Greg spun around in the conference room chair. "They stare at you with their big, shiny teeth." Clearly he was waiting for this part.

Viktor, our hero, critted with the rocket launcher and scored 37 points of damage to a poong. Greg responded with wonderful sound effects, first of a rocket, then of a severely injured glow dragon.

Mojita focused on the poong Viktor critted and rolled a big, fat one.

"Sorry guys," I sighed.

"But you get a mutation card." Greg handed me a deck to choose from. I drew *mind trick*, which would grant me a bonus to an Interaction check. Helpful, if only the glow dragons understood us. Not one to let things go to waste, I decided to use it on Viktor to make him believe he's in love with Mojita.

"Umm ..." Viktor said. "You are the color of spring, Mojita,"

The glow dragons bit the chopper and did considerable damage. We were all tossed around inside. The other glow dragon hit and bloodied Lorthag.

"Well, that sucks," I said. I'm not used to how quickly characters go from full hit points to bloodied in this game. Fortunately, you can use second wind as a minor action.

Viktor managed another 29 points of damage. Ragnarok scored 9 points of damage by punching one of the dragons in the teeth. Mojita finally landed a shot of her own, and bloodied it with *eau de roach*.

"I spit in his face!"

The guys applauded, and Mojita used their positive feedback to make a very negative decision. She jumped out of the helicopter in an attempt to land on the back of a glow dragon. I rolled a one.

Greg laughed. "I'll let you make a saving throw to see if you managed to hang on."

Thankfully, I rolled a nineteen that time.

"Mojita drips off the helicopter skids like sap from a maple tree," Greg said.

The good news is I got another Alpha Mutation. This time it was *LMAO*, a power that acts similar to the laughing gas your dentist might give you.

"Seriously?" I asked. "I've heard of killing with kindness, but dazing with glee? Who comes up with this stuff?"

Greg cocked his head and raiseed an eyebrow.

Oh. Right.

I used my new mutation on my next turn and was delighted by how deadly hilarity can be. I dealt 21 points of damage. And because I hit, I could use my overcharge ability if I chose.

"Only wusses won't overcharge," Trevor said.

"Don't peer pressure me," I told him. But I was so going to overcharge anyway.

How many 1's can a girl roll, you ask? I'll tell you. *Three*. I know this because that was my third. I hit the glow dragon, but I also hit myself.

"I laughed myself prone," I told the guys. But I wasn't out of the game. Mojita is packing *hard to kill*, which allowed her to regain 10 hit points when knocked down to 0.

"It's true what they say about cockroaches," Josh said. "They can survive anything."

That proves to be true of the whole game. We defeated the glow dragons, Mojita defeated her agoraphobia, and I defeated my irrational fear of role-playing. As for teenagers ...

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble has not stopped eating green Jell-O since her last *Gamma World* game. Is that wrong?

Alumni: Gamma World

by Bart Carroll
illustration by Jared von Hindman

There's no easy way to cover the entirety of *Gamma World*—and for good reason. It has seen its fair share of versions since its initial 1978 release. But this is *D&D Alumni*, and our pledge has been to look back at the game's rich history—and this month, that includes the latest boxed set.

If this is your first foray into *Gamma World*, we're here to reveal something of that setting's strange origins. It's a wild place certainly, where anything is possible. Animals have evolved; mutants, androids and manic one-eyed chickens run wild; and the French have annihilated Peshtigo, Wisconsin (we'll explain that one a bit later).

Seemingly the stranger things get, the better.

Early Influences

How does this sound for a premise? A tribal civilization exists in what they consider their world, only one brave explorer among them quests farther out and realizes their world is actually a traveling spaceship. That's the plot to Brian Aldiss's debut novel, *Non-Stop*.

Elements of the novel and the concept of generation ships would influence James M. Ward and his 1976 game, *Metamorphosis Alpha* (appropriately subtitled a "Fantastic Roleplaying Game of Science-Fiction Adventures on a Lost Starship"). *Metamorphosis Alpha*, in turn, would later impact game sessions of the creators of the Dungeons & Dragons® game. As Gary Gygax wrote in the 1st Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*: "Readers of *The Dragon* might already be familiar with the concept of mixing science fantasy and heroic fantasy from reading my previous article about the adventures of a group of AD&D characters transported via a *curse* scroll to another continuum and ending up amidst the androids and mutants aboard the *Starship Warden* of *Metamorphosis Alpha*."

We have to go back to *Dragon* #17 to find that previous article by Gary Gygax, a piece (titled as good as any pulp fiction: "Faceless Men and Clockwork Monster"):

"When last winter's tedium was broken by the fun and games at Winter Fantasy, I was scheduled for DMing continual adventures in Greyhawk Castle, and that is exactly what they turned out to be: continual. Not having the heart to cut them short, I ended up eating meals while play went on, and the games lasted from morning into the late hours of Saturday night, from early Sunday morning straight through until evening, and fatigue made me a bit silly. When the last party, which included several regulars in the campaign (Mark Ratner and Jim Ward each playing one of their player character henchmen, and Ernie Gygax playing the character another participant had abandoned when he or she had to leave for home), beat up a body of

Gamma World
Character Creation:
You walk in wanting to field the deadliest road warrior the wasteland has ever seen...
...But are infinitely more likely to walk away a pile of cranium rats armed with a teddy bear.
Yes, Gamma World is just that Awesome.

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gnolls and slew their master, there was a scroll amidst the heap of booty. It was, of course, a curse scroll, and it was a curse which whisked all creatures off to another world."

As the article continues, there was a 1 in 10 chance that the other world would turn out to be the *Starship Warden*—and what should be rolled, but a 1.

"Imagine the surprise which struck my weary countenance with a look of wonder . . . imagine the groans from the regulars! They didn't want to be stuck aboard Warden, not with precious henchmen, aboard that deathtrap. But all six characters, along with three gnoll prisoners, were, in fact, exactly that. The whole party was gone from the ken of D&D-kind and off amongst the horrors of Metamorphosis Alpha."

(Remembrances of the original *Metamorphosis Alpha* can also be found at Tor.com and Grognardia.com. The game itself continues to this day, at metamorphosisalpha.net.)

From Alpha to Gamma

Metamorphosis Alpha would naturally influence the creation of James Ward's (and Gary Jaquet's) *Gamma World*. Anyone with passing familiarity knows, *Gamma World* was originally set on post-apocalyptic Earth (or rather, post-post-apocalyptic Earth, following a second devastating nuclear war) in the year 2471.

"The weapons which had wrought the destruction were many and varied. Targets were seared by lasers, blasted by fusion devices, and razed by new and unfathomable energies developed in the final months of the conflict. Only the most highly fortified areas (military headquarters, spaceports, and the like) remained even partially intact. Neutron bombs, unhindered by most forms of shielding, decimated those who remained within even these strongholds, leaving concrete and metal tombs housing incredibly complex equipment, now stilled for lack of human guidance. Many of the weapons . . . were of a biogenetic nature and nearly all life forms suffered some kind of mutation."

The *Gamma World* setting has changed slightly in its most recent incarnation—instead of nuclear war, there's been a "Big Mistake" over at Switzerland's Large Hadron Collider and a multitude of universes have collapsed onto our own. As mentioned, just about anything is possible in this setting: Your character might be a 10-foot tall baby, a hawkman, or a gelatinous mess trapped inside a cockroach-shaped bundt pan (all examples from here around the office). Rich Baker and Bruce Cordell recently chronicled the design of the latest version in *Design & Development*'s "How We Brought Down Civilization."

My own exposure to *Gamma World* came with those odd mentions in the 1st Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. In the section "Travel in the Known Planes of Existence," Gary Gygax wrote:

"For those of you who haven't really thought about it, the so-called planes are your ticket to creativity, and I mean that with a capital C! Everything can be absolutely different, save for those common denominators necessary to the existence of the player characters coming to the plane. Movement and scale can be different; so can combat and morale. . . . If your players wish to spend most of their time visiting other planes (and this could come to pass after a year or more of play) then you will be hard pressed unless you rely upon other game systems to fill the gaps. Herein I have recommended that Boot Hill and Gamma World be used in campaigns."

Boot Hill, of course, was the Old West-themed setting also being promoted by TSR at the time. The section on Gamma World also provided instructions for D&D/Gamma World character conversion, with a chart for the compelling armor types such characters might possess.

Gamma World Armor to AD&D Armor	
No Protection	10
Shield only	9
Furs or skins	8
Furs or skins & shield/cured hide armor/ plant fiber armor/partial carapace	7
Cured hide or plant fiber armor & shield	6
Sheath armor/piece metal armor/total carapace	5
Sheath armor/piece metal armor & shield/ total carapace & shield	4
Powered plate/plastic armor	0
Powered alloy/energized/inertia/powered scout/ battle armor	-4
Powered attack/assault armor	-8

AD&D Armor to Gamma World Armor	
None	10
Shield only	9
Leather or padded	8
Leather or padded & shield/studded leather/ ring mail	7
Studded leather or ring & shield/ scale mail & shield/chain mail	6
Chain mail & shield/banded or splint mail	5
Banded or splint mail & shield/plate mail & shield	4
Magic armors from AC 1 to -2	3
Magic armors from AC -3 to -6	2
Magic armors from AC -7 to -10	1

As we'll see later in Expedition to the Barrier Peaks, finding a nifty suit of armor or weapon in Gamma World didn't always mean being able to deploy it; a labyrinthine Artifact Use and Operation chart had to be negotiated first, where it was "... quite possible that one will fiddle with an artifact for weeks and never determine what it is, or, in the other extreme, detonate a bomb, eliminating everything within 100 meters."

The risks, however severe, were worth it. The setting offered black ray guns (the ultimate hand-held weapon); police riot armor; matter, negation, and mutation bombs; and, of course, energy weapons such as the vibro blade (a force field in the shape of a sword, which cut anything except another force field), which might have been influenced by Larry Niven's monofilament blades, but more probably by lightsabers.

And who among us didn't want one of those?

Further Material and Influences

As mentioned, *Gamma World* has undergone several versions in the past—including the second, featuring Larry Elmore illustrations; the third, with the iconic cover art of a rider in shiny armor (almost Cylon-esque) atop a podog; and the fifth, published as part of *Alternity*. (We mention this last for a specific reason. *Alternity* would later fold into the *d20 Modern* game, including its *Dark Matter* setting and Hoffman Institute—a detail that might become apparent during this year's Gamma World Game Day.)

Dragon Magazine would also supply *Gamma World*'s initial support material. In issue #19, for example, Gary Gygax provided a new list of "treasures" to be found that still works for a scavenged ancient junk table (a sampling of which appears below). In issue #25, James Ward revealed background material for numerous Cryptic Alliances—the secret organizations throughout the world, several of which are still mentioned within the current setting: the Archivists, Brotherhood of Thought, Knights of Genetic Purity, Radioactivists, and Restorationists, who:

"... survived in shelters in Boston and Providence. They crawled out of their areas and tried to pull the pieces together from the rubbled cities around them ... All of their towns and farms are guarded by robotic units that are programmed to kill humanoids and mutants without warning and conduct humans to the main city. There are 5 town groups that each have an armory manned with men capable of using the powered armor and weapons at hand; a factory unit programmed to manufacture their everyday needs; and a group of robots designed to cannibalize the old cities for materials the smaller groups need."

From Gary's campaign teleported aboard the Warden to the suggestion of Gamma World's setting as a plane of existence, science-fiction has crossed several times into the world of Dungeons & Dragons. Perhaps the most notable example came with *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, the adventure module that literally crashed a spaceship into the D&D world. As far as *Gamma World*'s own adventures, it's certainly no coincidence that *Famine in Far-Go* and *Legion of Gold* are coming out for this latest version. These were also the setting's original adventure modules. Next month we'll take a closer look at November's *Famine in Far-Go* ... in particular, its nods to the *Barrier Peaks* (if it hasn't been mentioned before, the froghemoth and vegepypmies are both coming back!).

Die Roll	Discovered Item
01.	Claw hammer—good condition, but handle broken
02.	Plastic coat hanger—poor condition (melted)
03.	Nylon rope—good condition (20. m. coil)
04.	Entrenching tool—fair condition, sleeve rusted
05.	Bicycle reflector—good condition (red, yellow, white, or blue color)
06.	Pencil—excellent condition, point broken
07.	Small bottle of insect repellent—fair condition
08.	Uctrodynamical potzreibie counter—poor condition, all 6 dials broken
09.	.22 cal. pistol—fair condition, 9 shot
10.	Home donut maker—poor condition

Die Roll	Discovered Item
11.	News magazine or comic book—(very) poor condition
12.	Plastic bag of grass seed—fair condition
13.	Screwdriver—fair condition
14.	Ceramic salt shaker—good condition, full
15.	Bicycle—fair condition, seat missing and tires flat
16.	Stapler—poor condition, no staples
17.	Plastic container—excellent condition, full of plant food
18.	2-12 aluminum arrows, feathers gone, field heads
19.	Book—good condition, reading primer
20.	Pair of scissors—fair condition, screw rusted

Froghemoth **Level 8 Elite Soldier**
Large terrestrial beast (aquatic) XP 700

HP 178; **Bloodied** 89 **Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 20 **Perception** +13
Speed 5, swim 7 **Resist** 5 fire
Saving Throws +2

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking the froghemoth.

Aquatic
The froghemoth can breathe under water. While underwater, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against creatures without the aquatic trait.

Electrical Torpor
Whenever the froghemoth takes electricity damage, it becomes slowed (save ends).

Swamp Walk
The froghemoth ignores difficult terrain that is mud or shallow water.

Standard Actions

Tentacle (physical) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 physical damage, and the target takes 5 physical damage whenever it attacks any creature other than the froghemoth until the end of the froghemoth's next turn.

Tentacle Flurry ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The froghemoth uses tentacle four times. No more than two of the attacks can target the same creature.

Bite (physical) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 5 physical damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). The froghemoth cannot use *bite* or *grasping tongue* while the target is immobilized in this way.

Minor Actions

Grasping Tongue ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Melee 5 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: The froghemoth pulls the target 5 squares.

Swallow (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one Medium or smaller immobilized creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The froghemoth swallows the target, and the target is stunned and takes ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends both). Until the target saves against this effect, it has neither line of sight nor line of effect to any creature, and no creature has line of sight or line of effect to it. When the effect ends, the target appears in an unoccupied square of its choice adjacent to the froghemoth.

Free Actions

Elite Action ✦ **Encounter**
Requirement: It is the froghemoth's turn.
Effect: The froghemoth takes an extra standard action during that turn.

Triggered Actions

Flailing Tentacles ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the froghemoth.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The froghemoth uses *tentacle* against one creature in range.

Skills Stealth +11 (+21 while underwater)

Str 21 (+9)	**Dex** 13 (+5)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 3 (+0)	**Cha** 6 (+2)

But before we leave, why Peshtigo, Wisconsin? What did they ever do to deserve nuclear annihilation? As Rich Baker explains: "It's mostly because Peshtigo is just a funny name. I mean, just say it. Pesh-TEE-go. There's also a bit of historical weirdness associated with Peshtigo going back to a mysterious fire that erupted in the area in 1871, which some people think might have been caused by a comet impact. So, there's the little element of mystery.

"But, mostly the funny name."

And, folks, that right there sums up *Gamma World*!

About the Author

Bart Carroll joined Wizards of the Coast in the spring of 2004. Originally producing their licensed property websites (including *Star Wars* and G.I. Joe), he transitioned to the D&D website, where he's remained part of the D&D Insider Team. In this role, he primarily generates website content in support of the 4th Edition line of products, online magazines, and the gamer lifestyle—of which he is an extremely proud adherent.